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CANADIAN FILM

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BRITISH
HERITAGE

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AND BEYOND

CANADIAN
CINEMA AND
GLOBALIZATION

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THE COLLECTIVE

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STILLS

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Geneviève Bujold in *Isabel* (1968)

FACING PAGE

Pour la suite de monde

BACK COVER

What these ashes wanted (2001)



The Canada Council | La Commission des arts
FONDÉ EN 1957 | FONDÉE EN 1957
SINCE 1957 | DEPUIS 1957



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Canadian films and more

This issue features discussions of Canadian films from a range of contributors and perspectives, illustrating what critic David McIntosh has called "the messy assemblage" of diverse practices and institutions that characterise Canadian filmmaking. Filmmakers like Egoyan, Rozema and Cronenberg enjoy international critical and commercial attention and investment in an increasingly globalized film industry; David Pike asks the age-old Canadian question, from an American point of view, of what still makes them Canadian. Philip Hoffman is one of the most important artists in our strong tradition of personal and experimental filmmakers; Mike Cartmell, another of those artists, carefully considers Hoffman's latest film, *What these ashes wanted*. John Paizs began making films in that experimental vein; *Crime Wave* has made the strange cross-over to cult success and Robert Cagle delves into Paizs' cinematic world. George Melnyk examines the work of several extraordinary directors who have contributed to the distinct Quebec world of film in this regionally and linguistically divided country. The "art" films of Paul Almond have recently begun to receive due attention. Tony French looks closely at a sixties classic and a memorable performance by Geneviève Bujold. Robin Wood celebrates a teen drama with some, perhaps, distinctively Canadian attractions.

In addition, Diane Sippl explores the continuing influence of *Dogme 95*, Deborah Tudor offers a class revisionist take on British Heritage Film, Susan Morrison considers a recent premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival and Jeffrey Crouse reviews a new film book.

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Canadian Cinema in

by **David L. Pike**

I feel very uncomfortable about this stuff, because for so long I've gotten a certain energy from being outside that it's difficult for me to accept the fact that part of me has now been accepted into the system. But of course it completely has. The moment you make a film that as many people have gone to see as *Exotica*, or has been awarded by industry as *Exotica*, you've been absorbed by the system. So anyone who's defined themselves outside of it can't help but feel a bit uncomfortable. But that's happened, and I don't feel I've compromised anything in order to allow it to happen. —Atom Egoyan (1995)

Nearly ten years ago, Kass Banning introduced a previous *CineAction* special issue on Canadian Cinema by announcing that "In spite of the ascription that Canadian culture cannot exist—that it is indeed an impossibility—we are witnessing a surge, a 'new wave' of filmmaking in this 'imaginary' nation."¹ If that wave can be said to have crested in Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) being feted at Cannes and nominated for two Academy Awards, and David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) gaining notoriety worldwide and a special jury prize at Cannes, the sure signs that it had come down, to be transformed into something else, were clear to see by 1999, which saw the release of Egoyan's, Cronenberg's and Patricia Rozema's deepest forays into *echt* commercial territory ever: the Ireland-set serial-killer drama, *Felicia's Journey*, the English heritage classic, *Mansfield Park* (part of a three-movie deal with Miramax), and the video-gaming science-fiction comedy, *eXistenZ*. While the first two were quasi-independent 'art' films, all three were produced, distributed and exhibited far more within a commercial Hollywood framework than outside of one.

I will argue below that these three films do not necessarily represent either a sell-out or a repudiation of some essential 'Canadianness' in the filmmaking of any of these directors; for the moment I want simply to register the fact that they constitute a new direction, perhaps the most important feature of which is a different relationship to the multi-national film production world, a relationship evident even in Guy Maddin's most recent feature (and first in 35mm), *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997). None of the directors of this so-called 'New Wave' have lacked in critical coverage, but there has been little serious critical attention paid to outlining the characteristics of the movement as a whole, to studying the ways in which it may have been related to changing attitudes to Canadian culture in general, and



Highway 61

1. Kass Banning, "Editorial," *CineAction* 28 (1992): 2.

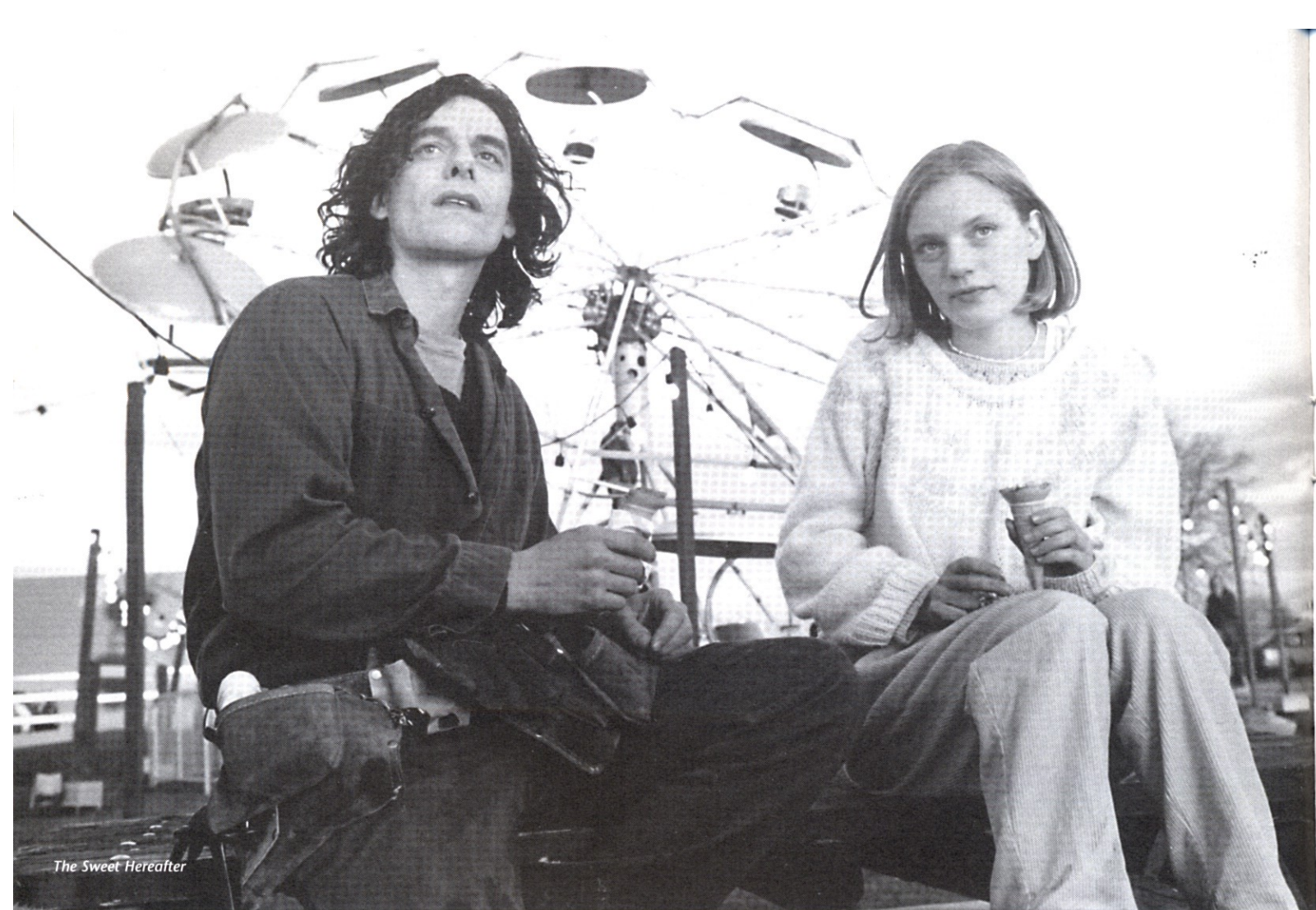
the Age of Globalization



eXistenZ, David Cronenberg



Felicia's Journey, Atom Egoyan



The Sweet Hereafter

to a fundamental transformation in the relation of these films to Hollywood-derived practices of production, storytelling and representation. Uniquely in the history of Canadian cinema, this New Wave was at least in part a commercial phenomenon, not just within Canada, but especially in the United States, Europe and elsewhere.²

As Geoff Pevere noted around the same time as Banning, the New Wave, which he limited to Ontario, emerged out of the ruins of the tax-shelter debacle created by the Capital Cost Allowance (CCA) authorizing a one-hundred percent tax write-off between 1974 and 1984.³ By channelling nearly all available funding into fly-by-night Hollywood-bound rubbish, the CCA made it extremely difficult for key figures in both Québécois and English Canadian film of the '60s and early 70s to continue making films. Moreover, the ensuing mutual antipathy between aesthetic and commercial goals polarized a scholarly community already primed by the uncompromising dictates of post-structuralist theory, and a critical community radicalized by the injustice of the CCA and furious at its effects on a fledgling film culture. The result has been an enduring critical bias against any signs of departure from the documentary-based, local and explicitly politically engaged realism of the pre-tax-shelter years that has caused world-class directors such as Egoyan and Cronenberg to be recognized far sooner

abroad than at home, and led to a reluctance even to look for common features among the ever more diverse output of Canadian filmmakers.

The start of the '90's boom can be fairly precisely dated: Denys Arcand's contemporary satire *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) was the highest-grossing film in Quebec in the '80s and an international hit, even breaking into the usually recalcitrant French market; in 1987, Rozema's debut, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, was the darling of the festivals and one of the first films distributed by soon-to-be indie giant Miramax, while the portrayal of media and mediated desire in Egoyan's *Family Viewing* galvanized his reputation with theory-driven film scholars worldwide; in 1988, *Dead Ringers* made Cronenberg as close to respectable as he would ever be, and Maddin's *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* was a cult hit in the States and Europe. The success of this New Wave was primarily popular in character, as each film was able to locate a greater or smaller niche audience while also being relatively well received in the mainstream press. At the same time, all of them were either criticized or ignored by loyalists to established Canadian cinema for political and/or aesthetic shortcomings: *Déclin*, *Mermaids* and *Dead Ringers* for their sexual politics, *Family Viewing* and *Gimli* for their inaccessibility and weirdness, *Dead Ringers* and *Gimli* for their visual extremism.⁴ There was simply no con-

ceptual framework within Canadian culture in which to meet these films on their own terms and then critically to analyze those terms. They were simultaneously audience-oriented and artistically ambitious, story-based and yet skeptical of narrative, fundamentally Canadian and yet resolutely outward-looking and internationalist.

It is important to evaluate this initial boom in the context of several other contemporaneous cultural phenomena not always associated with it or with another. The international viewpoint of this cinema, its insistence on placing Canada and Canadians within a broader context, be it North American, European or global, was paralleled by a new form of co-production far more fruitful than the exploitation of the tax-shelter years. For example, Egoyan's *Calendar* (1993) was born out of a (short-lived) grant from Soviet Armenia and financed by German television; Léa Pool made her increasingly commercially visible films partly with Swiss money. As European television expanded into cable and privatization, its various channels sought investment opportunities; money from France's Canal+, France and Germany's Arte, Germany's ZDF, England's Film Four, and others came to share production costs with the NFB, OFDC, CFDC, Telefilm Canada and other sources of national or provincial funding, as well as with the new subsidiaries established in the United States by the Hollywood studios to cash in on the American 'indie boom'. Co-production brought its own pressures, and international backers had their own, generally bottom-line driven priorities; for instance, it has led to the wide-spread use of Canadian cities to stand in anonymously for other cities, and for the Canadian landscape to stand in as an abstract symbol of primal wilderness.⁵ Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that the New Wave filmmakers sold out or that the pressures of co-production would necessarily result in the same inferior results as those of the CCA years or of the '50s and '60s in Europe. Accustomed to creative independence by early support from government money, by long experience in politicized filmmaking (Arcand), or by independent production (Cronenberg), the New Wave directors appropriated the new means of production to put across a transformed vision of cinema. To say that they were transformed by the same process is no different than to note the negative as well as the positive effects of economic and political constraints on marginal and experimental filmmaking. Better production values mean different concerns and a larger audience; in the political climate of the '90s they did not necessarily entail a diminished level of social critique any more than political engagement followed naturally from being a marginal filmmaker.

As production was internationalized, so were Canadian filmmakers themselves: in addition to Egoyan (Armenian, born in Egypt) and Pool (a Swiss immigrant), directors such as Deepa Mehta, Mina Shum, Srinivas Krishna, Clement Virgo and even Maddin and other provincial figures began in the '90s to make movies that, as Peter Harcourt put it, moved away from the dualism of English Ontario versus Quebec, and toward a "cinema of cultural diversity."⁶ Because Harcourt focused on the sheer excitement of such a shift in focus, he understandably paid little attention to the uneven quality of the films he sur-

veyed, nor could he have predicted that Shum would soon make a couple-on-lam movie with no discernible multicultural content (*Drive She Said*, 1998), or that Mehta would shift her attention away from the explicitly Canadian content of a film such as *Sam and Me* (1991) to the controversial Indian trilogy, *Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2001, production suspended). The internationalization of the filmmakers was accompanied by an internationalization of subject matter that moved beyond the implicit assumption of Harcourt's argument that, for example, an Asian-Canadian would make films about the Asian-Canadian experience. To be sure, that is how local funding would traditionally have been most readily obtained—and it did produce key films by all of the directors concerned—but as funding became more diversified so, in many instances, did the subjects taken on by the filmmakers as they responded to a complex blend of their own aesthetic imperatives, the lure of better production values and a bigger audience, and the various compromises involved in taking that lure.

A further development that has of yet not fully been assimilated into the critical framework of Canadian national cinema is implied by Toronto film magazine *Take One* (itself a product of the 'New Wave' '90s), which in 1996 and 1997 published a pair of lists of "100 Great and Glorious Years of Canadian Cinema" that underlined the presence of Canadians in Hollywood since the silent era and pinpointed several key areas of prominence, in particular the genre of postmodern, ironic comedy, arguably an unrecognized Canadian creation with intriguing affiliations to the equally Canadian strain of "meta-media" theory.⁷ In their challenge to what they saw as the isolationist approach of traditional Canadian film scholarship, the editors of *Take One* extended José Arroyo's 1992 call for a new dialectic balancing the study of Canadian film with a study of the Hollywood-dominated Canadian cinema culture out of which the country's filmmakers had, like it or not, emerged.⁸ In a telling convergence of these issues that was

2. I should identify my own paradoxically marginal/central position in the current context, which, although it has led me to feel authorized to undertake a systemic reading of Canadian film in the '90s from the outside, has equally created blind spots that will I am sure be readily apparent to any informed Canadian. As an American approaching Canadian cinema, I have taken a triple perspective: the moviegoer (I have defined the corpus I discuss partly by the fact that nearly all of the films mentioned were first seen by me in a commercial cinema), the film scholar who finds in 90s Canadian cinema a compelling model for a narrative cinema that would be both critical and accessible, and the teacher of a course on Canadian cinema to students about half of whom were already fans of a particular director (primarily Egoyan and Cronenberg) and about half of whom had not or were not aware that they had ever seen a single Canadian film.

3. Geoff Pevere, "Middle of Nowhere: Ontario Movies after 1980," *Post Script* 15:1 (Fall 1995): 9-22, at 11.

4. For some examples: on *Déclin*, see Robin Wood, "Towards a Canadian (Inter)national Cinema," *CineAction* 16 (Spring 1989): 59-63; on *Mermaids*, see Mary Alemany-Galway, "Postmodernism in Canadian Film: I've Heard the Mermaids Singing," *Post Script* 18:2 (Winter/Spring 1999): 25-36; Marion Harrison, "Mermaids: Singing Off Key?" *CineAction* 16 (May 1989): 25-30; on *Dead Ringers*, see Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe, "Dead Ringers: The Joke's on Us," *CineAction* 16 (May 1989): 64-8.

5. Jim Leach, "Lost Bodies and Missing Persons: Canadian Cinema(s) in the Age of Multi-National Representations," *Post Script* 18:2 (Winter/Spring 1999): 5-18; Mark Dillon, "Northern Exposure," *American Cinematographer* 81:9 (September 2000): 126-33.

6. Peter Harcourt, "Faces Changing Colour Changing Canon: Shifting cultural foci within Contemporary Canadian Cinema," *CineAction* 45 (1998): 2-9, at 7.

7. Pevere, "Ghostbusting: 100 years of Canadian Cinema, or Why My Canada includes *The Terminator*," *Take One* 5:12 (Summer 1996): 6-13, at 11. The second special issue was *Take One* 5:15 (Spring 1997): 24-39.

either unconscious or a great example of Canadian deadpan, Barry Keith Grant introduced the first special issue devoted to Canadian cinema outside of Canada by complaining that rather than films by Egoyan, Cronenberg and Maddin, 60% of the Canadian box office of 1994 had been accounted for by *True Lies*, *The Mask* and *Speed*.⁹ Aesthetic criteria aside, each of these quintessentially Hollywood blockbusters has a member of *Take One's* list as an integral component of its success: James Cameron (responsible for the action-movie version of the post-modern deconstruction of identity), Jim Carrey (the comic loser-hero par excellence), and Keanu Reeves (in the first of several roles as an anodyne and non-threatening lead to supplement his cult, 'dude' persona). In other words, what Grant was in fact bemoaning was the displacement of Canadian film in Canadian cinemas by what was by another standard also Canadian film. Now, few would want to trade these three blockbusters for Bruce McDonald, Rozema and Maddin, but neither is it a cut-and-dried antinomy as it was during the tax-shelter years: we can no longer speak as if a single (or even a dual) Canadian cinema is all there is. And it has become all the less cut-and-dried over the past five years as the New Wavers have become established mid-range 'independents' in a film market that no longer contains any easily delineated borders between commercial and non-commercial, Hollywood and non-Hollywood, affirmative and critical.

Several questions need to be raised at this point, most importantly: if the effect of the internationalization of the '90s has for all intents and purposes been to globalize both economically and aesthetically what had been a distinctively Canadian cinema, then what remains Canadian about it? Moreover, if it is too simplistic to view the critical tradition of Canadian film as having been coopted, then what criteria of judgment do remain available for us? And finally, if, as I began by suggesting, the New Wave as we knew it has finished, what is coming next? The short answer to all three is globalization; I will explain below what this means in each of these three contexts.

Crash looked something like a Hollywood movie and it had Hollywood actors in it. But nothing else about it—including the way the characters spoke, the emotionality, the subject, the narrative, or the use of music—was like a Hollywood movie. It confused people, they couldn't deal with it. —David Cronenberg (1999)

There is a common theme to the many attempts to distinguish what is particularly Canadian about Canadian cinema: it is always defined negatively. This is true of Northrop Frye's oft-cited question, "where is here?"; it is true of the emergence of Québécois cinema out of the Quiet Revolution and the convergence of radical filmmaking with decolonization around the world in the 1960s; it is true of the Ontario New Wave, based on a "profound skepticism of . . . the most basic principle of Hollywood cinema—the belief in the transcendent powers of

individual will."¹⁰ It is true of the dualist cinema of the '60s and '70s, each partially founded on the wilful negation of the other, both ostensibly supported by the same national institutions; of the polarities that structure society (English/French, Native/non-Native, Canadian/American); of the bi-polar identities attributed to the more recent ethnic and immigrant communities, simultaneously Canadian and non-Canadian. The conceptualization of Canadianness as a fractured space given cohesion only by the oppositions that fracture it is so deeply rooted that it is no surprise that the only sign of a recognition that that landscape of oppositions was radically transformed during the '90s has been cries of warning as to the disappearance of a critical culture and a Canadian cinema altogether.

A more current although no less deceptive version of negation takes a universalist rather than a particularist approach. This is the argument that Canada as a nation was postmodernist *avant la lettre* because its attitude to culture and to nationhood has always been unstable, profoundly ironic and self-deflating.¹¹ In a Lacanian analysis of Canadian culture, Kieran Keohane has singled out two primary ways in which Canadians define what is "quintessentially Canadian": taking pleasure in enduring activities others might find immediately pleasurable (food, driving, outdoor sports) and celebrating their endurance of their essential lack of particularity as a nation.¹² This is potentially a truly empowering self-definition; after all, the Renaissance humanist Pico della Mirandola defined "human" in just the same terms: the only animal with no distinguishing qualities except for the capacity to grasp and to adapt any of those proper to other animals. Where it falls short is precisely where postmodernism as a theory of society fell short in the '80s: it ignores the continuing imaginative, affective and material presence of bits and pieces of all of the oppositions it persuades itself it has left behind or theorized away as mere constructs.

One of the most intriguing qualities about the Canadian New Wave has been the many different means whereby it both signalled its debt to and defined itself in opposition to the previous generation. McDonald's benchmark road movie, *Highway 61* (1991), contained "a veritable checklist of signature English Canadian concerns and clichés," from the road itself, the couple-on-the-lam and the loser hero of English Canadian film, to the coffin on top of the car, reminiscent of Claude Jutra's seminal 1971 drama of rural Quebec, *Mon Oncle Antoine*.¹³ Yet, Pevere's mention of Jutra already suggests a broadening of reference, just as Robert Lepage based *Le Confessionnel* (1995) on the enduring presence of Hitchcock and the production of *I Confess* in Quebec City, or Rozema cast iconic Québécoises actors in her Toronto-based films: Paule Baillargeon as the gallery owner in *Mermaids* and Pascale Bussières as the divinity professor in *When Night Is Falling* (1995). Moreover, as Pevere conceded in a footnote, the most apparent and important of the allusions—the music and music culture and the allegory of Highway 61 itself—were in fact American rather than Canadian, as was the feelgood ending, his enjoyment of which made Pevere, in typically worrisome Canadian style, extremely suspicious. As Chris Byford later argued about the film, McDonald had in fact used a multifari-

ous, playful and polysemous series of references to formulate a dialectics of relationships rather than a strict set of polarities.¹⁴ Rather than a straightforward failure on the Canadian road as in Don Shebib's seminal films, or a straightforward portrayal of the lure of American culture as in *My American Cousin* (1985, Sandy Wilson), in which we never catch a glimpse of the real space of America, McDonald rendered Highway 61 simultaneously as an actual highway joining Canada with the United States from Minnesota to New Orleans and as an imaginary space neither wholly Canadian nor wholly American: "American culture is not simply a colonizing force but a force that blends and is transformed by its context of reception."¹⁵

Postmodernist theory posited that meaning was super-saturated to the point of meaninglessness; there were only plays of signifiers, ironic quotation of the past, masks and masquerades. Proclaiming the absolute victory of capitalism and of the culture industry, it put forth ironic capitulation as the only way left to struggle against the behemoth of discourse. Yet *Highway 61* sent the would-be trumpeter and loser barber Pokey Jones (Don McKellar) on the road without actually fore-doing him either to failure or to an infinity of wandering, just as for Robert Zimmerman, whose childhood home in northern Minnesota McDonald pointedly had Pokey visit, the transformation into Bob Dylan was nothing so straightforward as a repudiation of his past or an ironic masquerade. Whatever the relation of Dylan to Zimmerman and Greenwich Village to the northern Great Plains, the effect of that transformation on both the material and the imaginary world, including Highway 61 itself, has been material and enduring. Postmodernism and poststructuralism can account neither for the stubborn residue of past forms, past cultural moments, no longer symbolically unified nor exuding their intended meaning but still powerfully present, nor for the unforeseen emergence of new hybrid forms of representation, new spaces of resistance seemingly from nowhere.

New conceptions of space, wrote Henri Lefebvre, may always strive for a perfectly controlled, perfectly closed and policed system, but new contradictions will always emerge out of the impossibility of creating such a system.¹⁶ As John Jordan asserts about globalization, "Transnationals are affecting democracy, work, communities, culture and the biosphere. Inadvertently, they have helped us to see the whole problem as one system, to connect every issue to every other issue, to not look at one problem in isolation."¹⁷ Canadian cinema of the '90s was unmistakably a product of globalization, marking the passage from failed resistance to American hegemony into an aesthetic response to the new situation of multi-national hegemony, more overwhelming in its scope, but more diffuse in its focus. One of its chief characteristics has been the new kind of intertextuality evident in *Highway 61*, pointed but playful, diffuse but interlocking in its representation of an emerging dialectics of Canadian culture and its many others.

Think of the way language becomes metacinematic in *Desperanto*, Rozema's contribution to *Montréal vu par . . .* (1992), neither an allegory of alienation nor a fable of reconciliation, or how Egoyan has always insisted on building sets for all of his films rather than shooting on location, seeming-

ly to mark himself off from the documentary tradition.¹⁸ As Egoyan says later in the same interview, "In order to preserve the memory of someone, you go to this very artificial means."¹⁹ The very act of constructing sets such as the institutional home in *Family Viewing* or the club in *Exotica* (1994) deconstructs the pretense to unmediated reality intrinsic to documentary-style narrative but also perpetuates the progressive intentions of that same narrative in terms of a new form of reality, highly mediated, yes, but also emotive and imaginative. Just as there is no Egoyan film without an underlying thread of humor, so there is none that does not represent its characters' usually alienated, mediated and perverse desires and experiences as "emotionally resonant and true," as he described his feeling about the video mausoleum he reconstructed for *Speaking Parts* (1989) when he heard about its possible existence in Japan.²⁰ Meaning is neither straightforward nor is it unironic, but no less is it directionless or meaningless.

Arroyo has aptly described Canada as a colony of the United States, but in a peculiarly intimate relationship, more akin to "a younger brother."²¹ The cultural anxiety attendant on such a relationship has been especially acute in the English-Canadian world, since there is no possibility of linguistic distinction. The same complaint echoes as in England that their movies are deemed successful (or even released at all, as was the case with *Cube*) only once they have made it in the United States first. But that anxiety also brings advantages, as in Cronenberg's comment above on the ability of *Crash* to mimic a Hollywood movie like a parasite, introducing something almost inimical to it while superficially faithful to it. Proximity to the States and an intimate knowledge of (and infiltration into) American popular culture have placed Canadian cinema and its practitioners in a position not simply to allegorize the colonial condition, as Frederic Jameson argued all third-world culture does on some level, but to allegorize a particularly skewed set of relationships to America, and, by extension, to that globalization the visible face of

8. José Arroyo, "Bordwell Considered: Cognitivism, Colonialism and Canadian Cinematic Culture," *CineAction* 28 (1992): 74-88. Peter Harry Rist's new reference, *Guide to the Cinema(s) of Canada* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), exhibits a tacit compromise in response to the *Take One* lists, including an appendix of "100 Other Notable Canadian Filmmakers and Actors" not necessarily directly linked to what he sees as Canadian cinema per se; films discussed in detail in the body of the guide include a few mainstream genre films such as Christian Duguay's *Screamers* (1996) along with the predictable classics. See also Wyndham Wise, *Take One's Essential Guide to Canadian Film* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), which addresses this issue implicitly by including entries on Hollywood and pop-culture figures alongside those for canonical figures within Canadian cinema.

9. Barry Keith Grant, "Introduction," *Post Script*, Special Issue: Canadian Cinema, 15:1 (Fall 1995): 3-5.

10. Pevere, "Middle of Nowhere," 13.

11. Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988).

12. Kieran Keohane, "Symptoms of Canada: National Identity and the Theft of National Enjoyment," *CineAction* 28 (1992): 20-33, at 30.

13. Pevere, "On the Brink," *CineAction* 28 (1992): 34-7, at 36.

14. Chris Byford, "Highway 61 Revisited," *CineAction* 45 (1998): 10-17.

15. Byford, 16.

16. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1974, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

17. In Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 267.

18. Harcourt, "A Conversation with Atom Egoyan," *Post Script* 15:1 (Fall 1995): 68-74, at 69.

19. Ibid. 73.

20. Ibid. 69.

21. Arroyo, 77.

which nearly always wears American brand names.²²

Few Canadian films of the '90s are without their allusions, however coded, to the behemoth south of their borders. Actors and/or characters frequently bear the weight of association: the presence of a name outsider actor among a director's regulars (even if he be English), such as Ian Holm's litigation lawyer in *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) can give his character an added resonance. Yet the allegory works differently than in the classic formulation, for often it is the very presence of such moments that in fact signals most forcefully that the film in question is *not* quite the same as a Hollywood product. More of my students have seen *The Sweet Hereafter* than any other Canadian film, but few would have identified it as Canadian or singled out anything specifically "Canadian" about it. They were attracted more generally to the accessibility of its otherness; what a Canadian critic would single out as its oblique and understated approach to tragedy, the depressiveness and isolation of its community, the presence of Egoyan's fetish-actors as townspeople vs. Holm as outsider were received by these viewers—self-identified outsiders all—as art film, full stop.

Don't you dare bore me—or yourself. Be willing to tell everything on yourself, but slantwise. We'll call what we're making fairy tales, to put all but the most inquisitive off the scent. Don't be pretentious or you'll wake up one morning and see Peter Greenaway peering back at you in the mirror. Never tell other people what you think they already know or would be willing to vote for. Why would you need (or want) a movie for that? Keep the dialogue fragrant, like honeyed wine. And finally, for God's sake, get some comedy into it, but make sure the presentation is deadpan. (The jokes should be as uncoercive and mysterious as Buster Keaton's face.)

—George Toles on scriptwriting for Guy Maddin

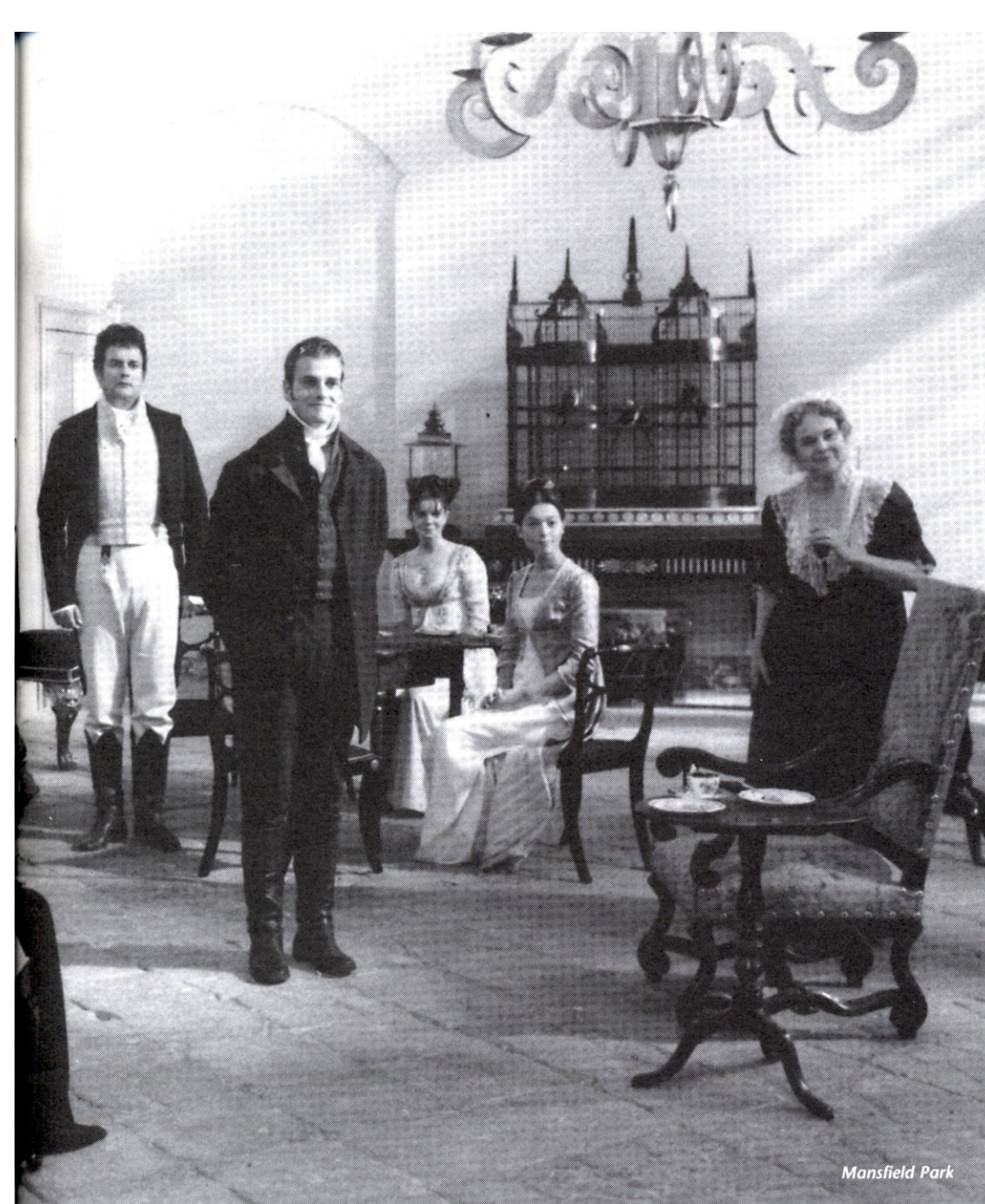
There are many different and often overlapping permutations of what we could call Canadian cinema's dialectical relationship to its past, to Europe, to Hollywood and to globalization; I propose four main categories below. What is important to note is that they are all more or less narrative, more or less genre-based, and pitched at a larger or smaller, but always specific audience. The very range of quality, subject-matter and commercial viability bespeaks less a capitulation to the forces of globalization than an appropriation of them to create a genuinely national cinema, one of the prerequisites of which is to be large enough for critical analysis to occur without either fearing or desiring to kill it off altogether. In addition to the ongoing dialogue with the classic tropes of Canadian cinema discussed above, what as an American outsider I find fascinating in this body of films are the ways they combine what



Hollywood traditionally has done well and seldom does anymore—provide visual and narrative pleasure through high production values and technological innovation—with an emotional depth and realism, an attention to character and a potentially subversive desire to represent the extremes and margins of human experience rather than some ideologically pernicious middle ground.

1) Films that take a dialectical approach to technology and its effects especially on the body. Cronenberg is the central figure here, but also much of Egoyan, and science-fiction/horror films such as *Cube* (1997, Vincenzo Natali), *Xchange* (2000, Allan Moyle) and *Ginger Snaps* (2001, John Fawcett). Rather than the bankrupt self-reflexivity of recent Hollywood horror series such as *Scream*, these films knowingly twist genre conventions to represent the complexity and ambivalence of our relationship to technology (Cronenberg, Egoyan) or to sexuality (*Ginger Snaps*) or to globalization (*Cube*).

2) Films of alienation, from gentler ones such as *Highway 61*



Mansfield Park

and *Mermaids* through *Last Night* (1999, Don McKellar), *New Waterford Girl* (1999, Moyle), much of Egoyan, Arcand's *Déclin* and *Jésus de Montréal* (1989), to the often traumatic films of Pool and Jean-Claude Lauzon. Usually seen as the core if not sole category of Canadian cinema, but note the tonal range from comedy and satire to tragedy. Note once again the internationalization of the context of the alienation: the dialogue in Lauzon's *Un Zoo la nuit* (1987) and *Léolo* (1992) between French-Canadian and Italian Montreal and the debt of both films to the '80s French "Cinéma du look"; Pool's thematization of her dual identity as an adult immigrant in all of her work, and the debt to Swiss cinema in *La Femme sauvage* (1991) and to Godard and the French New Wave in *Emporte-moi* (1999); Arcand's doubling of Montreal between a grounded city with a long and troubled historical memory centred on the Mont-Royal and a "nowhere" city embodied in the inhuman métro and the skyscrapers peopled by the agents and the victims of postmodernity.

3) Films exploring sexual identity, often through thematic

subjects wholly or partially taboo in mainstream Hollywood. This includes often niche-marketed gay-and-lesbian features such as Jeremy Podeswa's *Eclipse* (1994) and *Five Senses* (2000), Anne Wheeler's *Better than Chocolate* (1999), *Love and Human Remains* (1993), *When Night Is Falling*, *Fire*, and the films of John Greyson, as well as less easily labelled and perhaps more transgressive 'heterosexual' films such as *Crash* (not to mention Cronenberg's tax-shelter films) or *Kissed* (1997, Lynn Stopkewich), with its unblinking portrait of necrophilia. Characteristic of these films is their treatment of sexual identity and of gender as imbricated (for better or worse) within a broader social identity, and of the various marginal communities depicted as intertwined (for better or worse) within the broader communities around them.

4) Films about cultural difference, ethnic identity and marginality, including films by Mehta, Krishna (*Masala*, 1991, and *Lulu*, 1996), Virgo (*Rude*, 1995, and *Love Come Down*, 2001), Shum (*Double Happiness*, 1994), and others. Mehta and Krishna are particularly interest-

ing for the ways in which they have used the tropes and expectations of Canadian cinema to counterbalance their appropriation of Hindi film culture, Krishna primarily in order to break all their rules, but also to position his protagonist as an alienated loser who is trapped by fury at his role rather than ironic resignation to it, and Mehta as an outside influence, a different if implicit cinematic (and linguistic) tradition that somehow activates the radical choices made by Sita and Radha in *Fire*, unthinkable within Hindu tradition.

The last three categories could equally be applied to American independent cinema, which followed a similar trajectory, peaking during the '90s before being more or less fully incorporated into the global market by the end of the decade. The difference lies in the positive legacy of '60s realism in Canada:

22 Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88. The current paradigm shift has not substantially altered the heuristic utility of the argument. On branding and globalization, see especially Klein.

although their narratives are wont to distort and exaggerate reality in order to fit the demands of mainstream narrative, with few exceptions, the New Wave films remain non-judgmental about their characters and emotionally convincing in their motivation, acting and resolutions. A film such as *Kissed* raises highly disturbing questions about desire and the rights of non-consenting participants, but within a framework that allows them to be raised as such. By contrast, an equally disturbing film such as Todd Solondz's *Happiness* (1999) permits its viewers to despise its deviant characters while snooping on their filthy lives without any of the emotional connection or critical comprehension that an accomplished narrative necessitates.

Let me conclude with the case of Guy Maddin, probably the most important and certainly the most singular talent to emerge from the New Wave. Much about Maddin is quintessentially "Canadian": the aesthetics of deprivation that makes a virtue out of scant resources and isolation, the strangely mediated immersion in American pop culture, the deadpan self-deflating humor, as when Maddin describes in pre-video days memorizing a sound tape of *Vertigo* off television, complete with "one unfortunate commercial right in the middle of the revelation to the viewers that Judy is Madeleine . . . and it was tremendous."²³ At the same time, as Darrell Varga has observed, Maddin's "cinematic design and storytelling style disavows the instrumentalist and social-realist tendency in much of Canadian film."²⁴ Not that I think Maddin is quite that reductive in his relationship to prior Canadian cinema; what he does do, as Toles suggests in the quotation above, is displace the immediacy and intimacy of that tradition into a more personal but paradoxically broader place in his films.²⁵ Realistic in neither the Canadian nor the Hollywood sense, his films aim at a liberation of the imagination through the recreation of a deeply affective but subjectively remembered past. As *The Heart of the World* (2000), Maddin's acclaimed short, makes clear, there is nothing half-hearted about this endeavor; it is as engagé as any in film history, aiming at nothing less than saving the world through a hyperspeed journey through Soviet montage and Communist melodrama.

Nor is it as simple as outlined by Will Straw, that while "Maddin's work has little to do with Hollywood," it has rewritten "the history of movies so as to privilege . . . minor, marginal movements" such as the Icelandic saga, Soviet montage films, and the mountain films of '20s Germany.²⁶ Precisely in its presentation of a blatantly artificial surface as a genuine representation of reality and emotions, Maddin's aesthetic also mimics '50s Hollywood. Conversely, while the movements that echo through Maddin's films may seem minor when viewed from a dominant tradition such as English literature or Hollywood, they were in fact created as ambitious inventions of national culture ex nihilo. The relationship of Maddin's films to both center and margin is dialectical: rather than pure camp, the skewed mimicry of Hollywood at its most transparently spurious both distances its influence and appropriates its power as its own; rather than whimsical or submissive, the recovery of marginal forms serves newly to contextualize Canadian cinema, not

on the periphery, but at the heart of the world.

It is too soon yet to determine whether Egoyan's insertion of Arsinée Khanjian as a lost mother preserved on cooking-show videos by her disturbed son in *Felicia's Journey*, or Rozema's insertion of a lesbian subplot and love scene ostensibly drawn from Jane Austen's letters into *Mansfield Park* is enough to slant their films from the anodyne trajectories envisioned by their producers. Unlike many others, however, I did think that *eXistenZ* managed to bear the weight of its budget, stars and trendy subject matter (although only after several viewings). It is not just the way the film refuses to take sides on the issue of virtual reality, nor the way Cronenberg avoided nearly all traces of present-day electronic equipment such as computer screens and TVs, nor the sly but omnipresent humor. It touches like the fate of the cuddly two-headed CGI lizard encountered by game designer Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh) at a country gas station and smugly labelled by her as "a sign of the times"—the first Disney moment to make it into a Cronenberg film and a glaring exception to the film's use of tangible props for its sf-effects. When we next encounter the audience-friendly creature, however, it is not as a sign of capitulation to market forces and merchandising, but of the immaterial and commodified made disgustingly material: it arrives on a platter of genetically modified amphibians ordered by Ted Pikul (Jude Law) as the 'special' in the 'Chinese Restaurant'. As Pikul finds himself forced by the game plot to ingest with pleasure a sign of the times he otherwise finds repulsive, *eXistenZ* begins to look more like a meditation on our desire to objectify technology as an immaterial spectacle instead of facing up to its interpenetration of our bodies and minds, than the superficial pitch about virtual reality.

Cinema has had two periods when its technological apparatus converged with revolutionary politics—the 1920s and the 1960s. It seems unlikely that there will be another, as cinema itself has been marginalized by digital technology just as in its heyday it marginalized the printed word. The hybrid cinema that characterized the '90s found a new form adequate to the new role of filmmaking and spectatorship in a global and digital economy. In their unique position geographically, economically and culturally, Canadian filmmakers produced over the past fifteen years, for better or for worse and often kicking and screaming, the first corpus of films to inhabit fully and in a formally and aesthetically cohesive fashion the global economy of the twenty-first century.

23. In John Anderson, "Guy Maddin," *Film Comment* 34:2 (March/April 1998): 63-7, at 67.

24. Darrell Varga, "Desire in Bondage: Guy Maddin's Careful," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques* 8:2 (Fall 1999): 56-70, at 59.

25. George Toles, "From Archangel to Mandragora in Your Own Backyard: Collaborating with Guy Maddin," *Post Script* 18:2 (Winter/Spring 1999): 52-63, at 53.

26. In Varga, 66.

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Stet

by **Mike Cartmell**

It means “let it stand.”

Without explanation, for now. Instead, let me oblige you to indulge in the fantasy of a moment of inscription: imagine Phil Hoffman darkly embunkered in his digital basement, bringing to fruition several years’ hard work on his cinematic response to Marian’s death, a task whose already formidable cargo is further laden by an apprehensive public, friends and colleagues (and critics?) poised in anticipation, festival spotlight in the offing, book in preparation; and there is a deadline! And now consider that upstairs the bright world teems—new loves, new job, new life abundant, loud, alive, living on, waiting for Phil to join in, to live there too.

Under these conditions, how is the work of mourning even possible? How possible is the making of the work mourning demands? How could one manage the intimacy required, or the courage, or the vulnerability, or the generosity? How could one avoid distraction, and I mean “being torn limb from limb.” How could one endure the thought of all the scrutiny about to ensue? To say that the task would be daunting is hardly adequate. It would have to be unbearable.

Fortunately, we’re only fantasizing.

Merely daunting is the present task (an altogether different sort of fantasy): what sort of address is possible toward a work so personal, so charged with grief, so apparently non-political as Hoffman’s *What these ashes wanted*, and how can it meet the demands of its venue, a magazine about cinema but also about action, whose name inscribes a certain militancy, a politics? How can one avoid the temptation to offer a respectful bromide, especially given the tragic loss out of which the film is built. Is it possible to wish to celebrate this filmmaker, his films, this film, and yet meet the work critically, engage it politically? I don’t know the answer to any of these questions.

The last time I wrote about Phil’s work, I employed the device of having an imaginary conversation take place as a sort of preface to the piece.¹ I think I was trying to be entertaining. In it, I used an expression that has wide currency among (mainly white) people in the deep south, where I was living at the time. It’s an instance of what my friend Neil Schmitz would call “confederate discourse.” I wrote: “I might could have a twin brother.” Not surprisingly, a copy editor figured that I’d neglected to delete either the might or the could, and so deleted one of them for me. When I got the edited copy, I wrote “Stet” in the

¹ Mike Cartmell, “Landscape With Shipwreck” in *Landscape With Shipwreck: First Person Cinema and the Films of Philip Hoffman*, ed. K. Sandlos and M. Hoolboom. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2001, pp. 222-244.

What these ashes wanted



margin, and appended an explanation of the usage. So when the book came out, and the deletion remained unstetted (yup, that's a word), I was hotter, as the Mobile gumbo-queens might say, than a black roux on a high flame. Editors were decried, publishers slandered. In retrospect, one sees how these things can happen, that nobody's to blame. Pressure of deadline. Mere oversight. Might could happen this time, too. But I hope not.

I like this phrase, this "might could," because it seems to combine (or let's say "confederate") notions of capability, possibility and intention, while subsuming them under the sign of doubt. It's not reducible merely to the sum of its parts; instead its meaning is disturbed by something which strictly is not part of it. It offers something while taking it back; it withholds while revealing. The statement "I might could help you clean up that kitchen" means, or could mean, something like "I'm quite willing and would like to help you clean up that kitchen, but only if you agree to it, I don't want to insist, not that you'd really need help anyway." There's a sense in which it's a more sociable, even more ethical idiom. At the same time, an advantage of "might could" lies in its ability to veil just about any assertion with a moderate ambiguity, and to leave the speaker at a certain remove from whatever he asserts, from any proposition about whose status he may not be entirely secure; not quite taking him off the hook, but leaving him a bit of squirming room, so that he may get off it eventually should he squirm to sufficient effect. Given that, consider what these statements might convey (or dissemble): I might could like to try that gumbo; I might could make a film about losing a loved one; I might could never forget you; I might could love you always.

You might could get it by now.

So to come, at last, back to the raft: despite my inability to answer the questions I posed above, I propose to carry on, insufficiently, with my merely daunting task to address, in this place, on this occasion, Hoffman's *What these ashes wanted*, but to do so under the rubric (if there can be such a thing) of the "might could."

To do so, and then to let it stand.

Here's one way of putting it: when a loved one dies, a hole opens up in the Real. A flood of images rushes in, as if to fill the gap. Mourning would work (might could work?) to marshal those images, to subject them, with no guarantee of success, to some form of symbolic constraint in a process not necessarily terminable since that gap, that hole, will have a persistence. In any case, we have a difficult, uncomfortable, unstable articulation of psychic registers: Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. The subject is in disarray, adrift, at risk even. Disaster, he no longer knows where to look to find the star that ought to guide him; no longer can he rely on familiar locators to let him know who it is that he takes himself to be. Is it any wonder that Freud described the process of mourning, with its dramatic intensity and hallucinatory hypercathexes, as resembling psychosis?

In her commentary on an earlier version of the film, Brenda Longfellow makes an astute point concerning the issue of the other's inscription in cinema.² Speaking of the sequence of Phil and Marian in the car as Marian makes her visiting nurse rounds, Longfellow writes:

...she confronts Phil (hiding behind his heavy 3/4-inch camera in the back seat), accusing him of not understanding how difficult it is to be filmed and how much the camera mediates and makes strange their relation. It is an important moment precisely because it honours the otherness of the other....[I]t anchors Marian in her lifeworld not simply as an image, idol or memory, but as a sensate and intentional subject in her own right, and one, furthermore, who explicitly defies the naturalness of a camera recording her image.³

There is another aspect to this sequence, however. Marian's complaint quite forcefully registers a valorization of the psychological (her feelings of unease regarding her place in front of the camera) over the physical (Phil's struggle with the heavy camera), a notion that she seems to regard as transparently the case, but whose validity hardly goes without saying; certainly it could be subject to dispute (to say the least, given the brute sovereignty of the physical in the region of illness leading to death). In addition, her protestations are a little excessive ("Oh Philip, you're nuts! You really are nuts! Sometimes I think you're so insensitive, really!"); once he explains, she becomes rather condescending, speaking to Phil as if he's a bit of a nob ("Well, that's a little different, you know. Do you understand the difference?"). Now it's true that all of this is carried on with good humor, and I'm not about to embark onto the terrain of how couples work out their private modes of communication. My point is that here and occasionally elsewhere, the film accords Marian some over-exposure, allows her to be presented in what may be other than the best light. Besides the idealization and aggrandizement of the lost other that might be expected, this film permits a certain aggressivity or even hostility to be advanced in her direction. That this may be so need not be seen as a weakness; it may be a sign of inconsistency or contradiction on the part of the maker (though I might could rather not speculate as to the specific operations of his psyche), but that would be something worth registering since it's something to which we are all likely to be subject. And that we are permitted to recognize Marian as some kind of imperfect creature, whether as a result of the irruption of someone's aggressivity or no, is part of the film's value; it provides a bit of purchase from which to resist (and to recognize the need to resist) the tendency to mythologize the lost loved one, to obliterate her faults, to reduce her in elevating her to the level of the ideal.

A black dog at loose ends, standing on a sidewalk; a kid on a front stoop conducting an imaginary orchestra (or is he a filmmaker quelling an applauding crowd at some festival awards ceremony?) This might could be what mourning is.

Though I met her the same day Phil did, I never had any extensive first hand experience of Marian as an intellectual, writer or artist. But I do remember an afternoon a year or two after they got together. Phil was out somewhere, and Marian and I talked for a few hours. I was going through some kind of a bad patch, as they say. She was generous and encouraging. I

2 Brenda Longfellow, "Philip Hoffman's Camera Lucida" in *Landscape With Shipwreck*, pp. 201-210.

3 Ibid., p. 207.



What these ashes wanted

think it was the last time I spoke with her for more than a minute or two. I left that kitchen feeling quite uplifted, a feeling which lasted for some time afterwards.

What these ashes wanted, I felt sure,
was not containment but participation.
Not an enclosure of memory,
but the world.

The key phrase in the film's epigraph (something which Marian had extracted from the work of American poet Mark Doty) is the "I felt sure." Participation and the world rather than containment or enclosure (or incorporation) is not the other's desire, but arises within the bereaved. It is the mourner who does not wish to be enclosed (trapped, embunkered) within or by his memory of the lost loved one; the "I felt sure" operates to project these wishes onto the departed, concealing, in what would appear to be a gesture of generosity or sacrifice, a flight from or defense against the affect, anxiety, which threatens him on account of what may not be loss, but rather, excessive proximity. Photography, and thus cinema, always functions in the mode of bereavement (recall Benjamin, Bazin, Barthes, et al.); making a film such as this one, making it public, is a way of securing this projection, a way of keeping this (projected) pact with the other, and at the same time an effort at underwriting one's own defense. Thus Benjamin's beloved Kafka: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds."⁴

This kind of "I felt sure" (under the sign of which the film proceeds) precisely bears the sense of the "might could."

In the sequence featuring a photograph from Guadalest, Spain, whose "dark surround" may house Marian's "after image," the on-screen text continues:

if I could brighten up this part of the picture
I might illuminate
the condition of her death
the mystery of her life
and the reason why
at the instant of her passage
I felt peace with her leaving
a feeling I no longer hold

Here it is in precisely the place of no information (the blank, silver-free part of the negative that allows all light to pass, thus giving black on the print) that the other, and the answer to her enigma, is sought. It is as if the subject knows without knowing that there is a constitutive failure inherent in his project, that it must fail in order to in any sense succeed: that is, to relinquish, to recuperate, to remain, to remember. And that photography (or cinematography) has a necessary relation to that necessary failure. In the mode of bereavement. I felt sure.

Her snow dance, the second version, black and white, high-contrast. The scratches, dirt and hair, visible splices, the slow bleach-out as she skips away. This might could be what mourning is.

In the section called "Four Shadows," an apostrophe to Marian (but which also, by its second person address, implicates, ensnares, the viewer), Hoffman replays a series of chance encounters with death experienced "not long before you died." Crucial here is the figure of Hatshepsut, the female pharaoh, whose presence in the film implicitly but nevertheless forcefully identifies her with Marian. Because she was a woman, and to prevent her from living on in eternity, Hatshepsut's name had been written out of Egyptian history, her image defiled, her body robbed from its tomb. And yet her

story and her name have been recovered, her image reclaimed; now there's a website promoting a biopic called "The Daughter of Ra"; the other day, Phil told me he'd heard that archeologists think they may have found her mummy at a recent dig. Hatshepsut oscillates, then, between presence and absence; her cartouche is both erased and legible; her crypt is empty and it isn't. A strong, active woman (socially, intellectually, artistically), Marian had a pharaonic bearing; we might say that in the film (the figure of) Marian is borne in the same oscillation as her ancient avatar, but with a twist. Neither presence nor absence, but some remnant, a something-other-than, is encrypted here; or better, resides here cryptically: that is, available, should we be up to it, for decipherment.

Two kids discussing an infestation of ladybugs, and the different varieties among the swarm. One relates an accidental squishing, to general amusement. This might could be what mourning is.

Your death is only available to me as your absence or as my loss. You are gone, outside me, and are now nothing since I am consigned to memory, to mourning, to interiorization. But this death that I cannot know, your death (or my own?), makes my limit apparent in my obligation to mourn, to remember, and thus to harbor within me something that exceeds me, is other than me, and is outside me: a remnant of your intractable absent otherness. In me without me, your trace. Without which no "in me" at all, no within to me. Your absence, irrevocable, carves me out, hollows me, leaves me with your trace, which is other than you. Else but that other, I relinquish. What remains, non-totalizable, non-composable, is fragment, scrap, ort, morsel. Them I savor, mourning.

Hoffman's practice is to work with leftovers, scraps, and the mode of his work is fragmentary. His approach is from the margins, and features the marginal: this grandmother; that body on a Mexican road; this twin and his brother; this one, this very one I loved, lost. It can be excruciating at times. There are even occasional bits that stick in the craw, refuse to be processed (for me, this time: Hasselhoff.) But in general, what it preserves, harbors, secretes, what opens in it, what swoons and ranges and percolates and dodges in this broad corpus is surprising, rich and deep. The work exceeds itself, is more than what it's made from, and becomes itself its own trace, its own remnant. Available for decipherment. At a theatre (not terribly) near you.

More Egyptology: during the filming at Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, the zoom barrel on Hoffman's lens jams, we are told, and later the camera stops working altogether. What gorgonizing Medusa's gaze has come within its field of view? It is not absence that makes the dead so disturbing to encounter (Hoffman's claim that each of his encounters made death "less strange" doesn't seem to me altogether plausible given the details); it's that the dead are somehow all too present, even too enjoying, we might say. Instead of lack, we come into contact with a lack of lack, a non-positive overabundance exceeding our capacity to grasp it, and it provokes a petrifying anxiety. I might could make a film about a lost loved one, but to do so means that the apparatus itself will stiffen and break, that what I wish to record will utterly resist

presentation; and it turns out that I can (and perhaps should) only avert my gaze, and in so doing merely mark the (lacerating) place/trace of what was to have been my subject.

The brilliant poetic reduction of the young Polish cousin in passing through/torn formations ("Where I was born, you filmed") re/deformed here (chiasmatically; under erasure perhaps) as "You filmed, whereon my trace was born(e)." This might could be what mourning is.

One of a number of beautiful, singular and compelling images in the film: sunlit Marian walking behind a line of columns at a temple of Horus, image replaced by shadow, not-presence and not-absence, and trace. A haunting. Mike Hoolboom's voice on the answering machine, delivering another potshard, a find from his dig:

In a later century, someone dropped and broke the cup, but it was too precious simply to throw away. It was repaired, not with glue, but with a seam of gold solder; and I think our poems are often like that gold solder, repairing the break in what can never be restored, perfectly. The gold repair adds a kind of beauty to the cup, making visible part of its history.

It's a comforting story, but there's another version: you might could never gather up all the pieces; one or two wind up down the cold air return or the sinkdrain, never to re-emerge. Some bits are so tiny you can't see to pick them up; eventually they're carried away by swarms of ladybugs. The molten gold solder drips on your hand, searing into your flesh, working its way through your system till it's lodged in your hot heart. The cup is repaired with Scotch tape and rubber bands, and you put it at the back of a shelf. Every time you happen to see it you're stiffened with an anxious rigor, and look away. This, too, is part of history. Is it visible?

Now think of Auden's meditation on Breughel's *Icarus* in "Musée des Beaux Arts" (with the son of Daedalus a figure both of the lost loved one and the artist who tempts the limits of the possible, flying too close to the sun):

...how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the plowman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

New loves upstairs, loud alive in the brightteeming day. This might could be what mourning is.

Perhaps in *What these ashes wanted* we have seen (at least the remnant of) something amazing. We might could sail on. And in the wake of the final frame, one word:

Stet.
It means "let it stand."

4 In Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968, p. 54.

Mike Cartmell is a writer and filmmaker.

Toward the Quebec Auteur: From Perrault to Arcand

By **George Melnyk**



A tout pendre

Quebec cinema burst forth with a new spirit in the early 1960s. It was following the lead of the new interventionist Liberal government of Quebec that wanted Quebecers to become "maitres chez nous." Quebec filmmakers decided to become masters in their own house by ending the decade-long drought in feature film production. A number of young film directors came to be recognized in the 1960s. It is impossible to discuss all their work and its significance, but what is possible, is an informed discussion of one or two key films made by each director, the importance of these films to Quebec cultural life and the interconnections among the various directorial visions and how their visions have come to represent a unique society.

The careers of these half-dozen directors are only a sampling of the directorial talent that Quebec inaugurated in the 1960s and 1970s. There are others, a number of whom have significant reputations. Having to provide a narrow sample recognizes the incredible artistic bounty that the Quebec film industry developed after 1960. Many of these directors became auteurs—filmmakers who wrote, produced, directed and sometimes acted in their own films. The auteur spirit springs from an individual artist's roots in a society and its cultures. It acknowledges artistic control of a cinematic product the way an author might control a book. Auteur films are films with a special vision but that vision is more than just an individual expression. Auteur directors express varied aspects of a national identity and their works contribute significantly to a nationality's claim to having a genuine national cinema. Pierre



Perrault (1927–99) was the documentarist that brought the meaning of the past into Quebec's current identity; Michel Brault (1928–) is the cinematographer and director who created the visual moods that came to distinguish recent Quebec cinema; Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (1941–) is the film critic and poet turned revolutionary filmmaker; Gilles Carle (1929–) is the cultural *animateur*, whose humor, irony and social caricature created a cinematic sociology of popular sensibilities; Claude Jutra (1930–1987) was the shy genius who gave Canada the enduring classic *Mon Oncle Antoine*; while Denys Arcand (1941–) concluded the sixties' generation's best work with two award-winning and internationally-lauded films, *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) and *Jésus de Montréal* (1989). Together these directors created a major body of work that was the second wave of Quebec's feature film industry.¹

In 1960 francophone Montreal had 64 cinemas, of which 54 showed only English language films.² That year there were 558 feature films screened in Canada, none of which were Canadian.³ Canada's population at the time was 18 million, of which 5 million lived in Quebec. Anyone aspiring to create Quebec feature films had to face the daunting statistics of being part of a minority culture in a national entity that was not making any feature films and had not done so for some time. Not surprising, it was the young who took on the challenge. The Liberal government had launched a "Quiet Revolution" based on a call for an anti-conservative ideological and social change. For example, in 1961 a law was passed

that allowed children under 10 to attend matinees, the first time since 1927. In ones and twos French-language features began to appear, both from the National Film Board (Office Nationale du Film–ONF) and from independent producers. By the end of the decade, almost 50 feature films in French had been released, more than double the number made during the first wave (1944–53).⁴ There was a new spirit of self-affirmation that embraced young filmmakers, most of whom were then still in their late twenties and early thirties when their first major work appeared. Quebec film historians have called the cinema of the sixties, "le cinéma de la révolution Tranquille."⁵ It was a period when cultural creativity joined hands with social concerns in a veritable epiphany of renewal generated by the "cinéma d'auteur."⁶

While the new political and social energy in Quebec created a national context in which Quebec film could come out of its shell, it was the "New Wave" cinema of France that was an inspiration for the province's Francophone filmmakers. "La

1 The first wave of Quebec feature films from 1944–1953 did not create any auteur directors other than Gratién Gelinas.

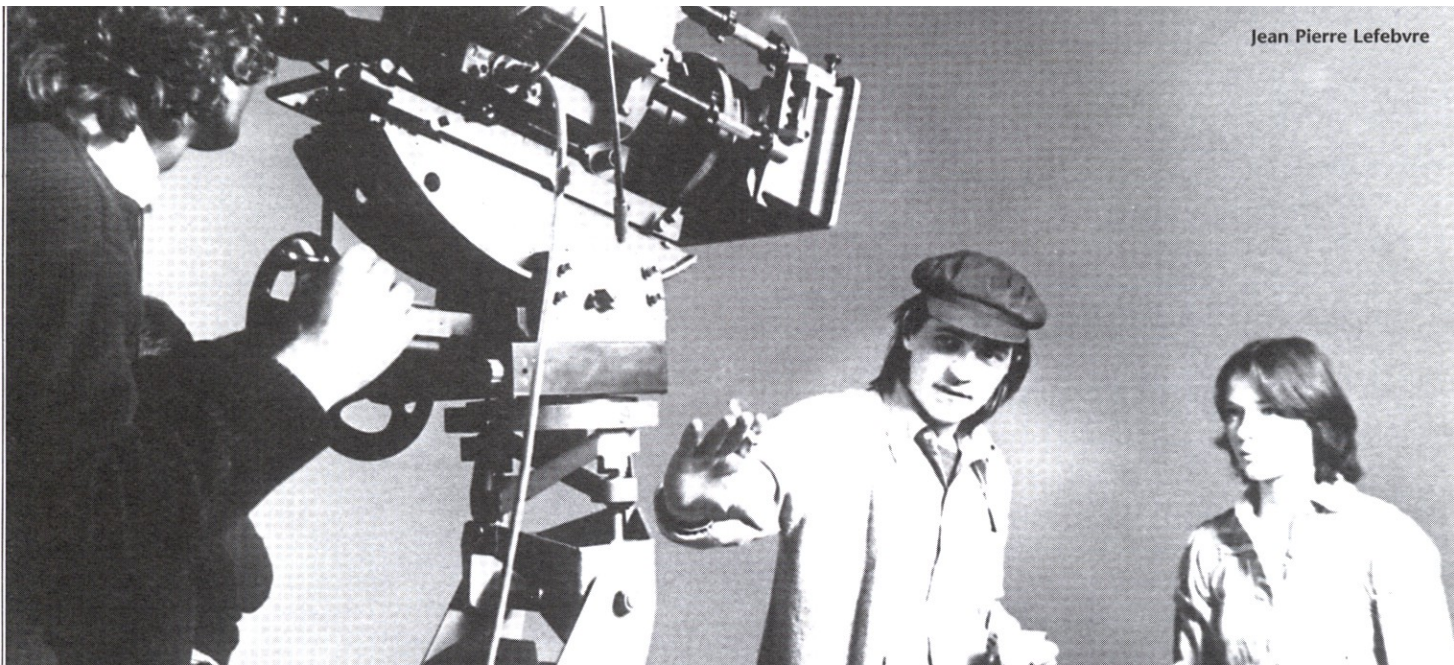
2 Pierre Pageau et Yves Lever, *Cinéma canadien et québécois: notes historiques* (Montreal: Collège Ahuntsic, 1993) p.44

3 Ibid.

4 *New Canadian Film* 3, 13 (April 1971) as reproduced in Manjuth Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) p.154

5 Yves Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec* second édition (Montreal: Boreal, 1995) pp.143–238

6 Ibid. p.148.



Nouvelle Vague Française" as it was termed, provided a non-Hollywood inspiration that led Quebec filmmakers in their own direction. The work of French directors, Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol and Rohmer was inaugurated in 1959 with Truffaut's *Les quatre cent coups* (*The 400 Blows*), which won the Critic's Prize at Cannes. Nouvelle Vague directors distinguished their approach by working improvisationally from an idea, casting friends and lovers in starring roles and using their own apartments as sets. They rejected typical melodramatic scenarios in favor of exploring the relationship of young heterosexual couples and they gave their work a certain "documentary" feel.⁷ These influences surfaced in the work of young Quebecers, who now had exciting, non-American role models.

Film may be categorized in numerous ways—by genre, by nationality, by gender, by region and by language. Canadian cinema has two branches—one English and the other French. This linguistic division means that the two cinemas live within the cultural orbits created by their respective languages and the countries that are dominant in that language. Since both languages were used by European imperialism from the 16th to the 20th centuries to create colonies around the world, these languages became the languages of various colonized nationalities, thereby creating an Anglophone and a Francophone universe. Since English was the leading imperial language via Britain and then the United States and France was a secondary imperial language, the Francophone linguistic universe was much smaller than the Anglophone. In the postcolonial period (after 1960) cross-national identification in the Francophone universe was weak and filtered through France. What did French-speaking Quebec have in common with French-speaking Cameroon? In turn what did either country have in common with France? So Quebec turned inward in order to express its own stories and its own cultural individuality within this broad general linguistic framework and the cultural values that may come with it. Here it could explore its differences, not only with the rest of Canada, but with all of *Francophonie*. A renewal of national identity was on the historical agenda.

At the same time—during the 1950s and 1960s—socialist-influenced national liberation movements in Africa, Asia and

the Caribbean were creating revolutions against colonialism and its heritage. Young Quebec filmmakers responded to these influences by associating their work with the concepts of national liberation and decolonization. They sought to affirm a new Quebec national identity that went beyond the hyphenated concept of the French-Canadian that had been entrenched for so long. In 1971 L'Association professionnelle des cinéastes du Québec issued a manifesto that stated:

Nous voulons que la collectivité Québécoise retrouve au cinéma un reflet d'elle-même qui soit juste, dynamique et stimulant."⁸

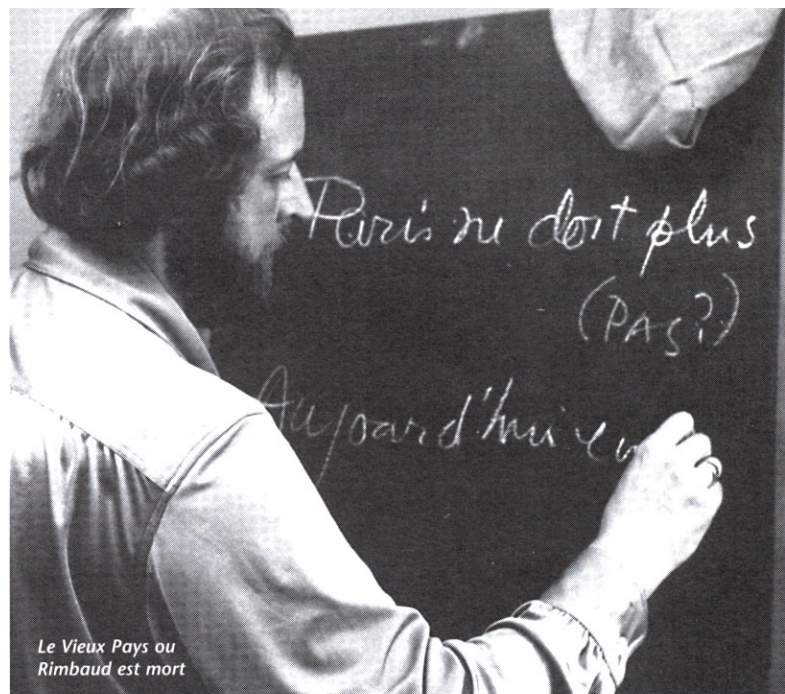
This goal, which had been in the hearts of young Quebec filmmakers for over a decade, was a nationalist goal, while at the same time it was tied to the confrontational and critical spirit of the sixties and early seventies, when student radicalism had swept so much of North America and Europe. It was attuned to national liberation struggles, socialism and a general spirit of freedom from capitalism and consumerism. There was a desire to create a better, less hypocritical and more socially liberated and exciting world. National cinemas of the time united their local concerns with global sensibilities in the hope of creating a new world order that was postcolonial and radically self-conscious.

Besides New Wave French cinema, Quebec filmmakers were also attracted to *cinéma direct*, a concept that was revolutionizing documentary filmmaking in Britain and the U.S. Michel Brault quipped that direct cinema was "une caméra qui écoute" (a camera that eavesdrops). The National Film Board had begun a series titled "Candid Eye" that represented the work of documentarists who used hand-held cameras and portable synchronized sound recorders to reach into the very deepest recesses of human activities. The French version of Candid Eye was titled "Panoramique". Direct cinema techniques gave filmmakers a sense of vitality, of being involved in daily life. These documentaries projected an energized reality filled with real people dealing with real-life situations. They were in "direct" contact with them. They let the people in the films speak for themselves rather than construct a voice-over

narrative with its dominating explanation of what was going on. The viewer was made to feel the presence of the camera and the involvement of the cinematic eye.⁹ Rather than use people's images to bolster a scripted narrative, direct cinema allowed people to script their own film.

When direct cinema ideas were transferred to feature films in the mid-sixties the results were startling. Like the New Wave directors in France, the Quebec directors preferred improvised dialogue over action. They emphasized the importance of what was being expressed by the actors in a scene over the requirements of a script. They used non-professional actors and the existence of a relationship between their actual lives and the story they were telling as the core of their inspiration and its novelty.¹⁰ The new reality was being expressed through the projection of the filmmaker's subjective self in such a way as to convey a mood of a spontaneous contemporary actuality.

In the early 1950s the NFB was an assimilationist organization, which did not value Quebec culture.¹¹ After the NFB moved to Montreal in 1956 it became a target of nationalist accusations of discrimination. An article in *Le Devoir* stated that of the 1109 films the NFB made between 1952 and 1956 only 69 (6%) were in French.¹² A revolt was inevitable. The major breakthrough in the direct cinema documentary mode was the 1958 film *Les raquetteurs* /*The Snowshoers* by Michel Brault and Gilles Groulx. Why was their use of *cinéma direct* techniques so appealing? Was it just a way of expressing the need of every generation to do things differently? Film scholar and critic, Bruno Cornellier, believes that Quebec literary fiction of the times was unable to capture the "gravity of the real" or provide a language of contemporary concerns.¹³ To tell their stories the new generation had to turn to their own experiences rather than external sources. Up to this point Quebec literature was highly traditional and filled with "folkloric authenticity."¹⁴ It was not until the 1940s that urban settings began to appear to fiction. So the young Quebec documentarists working at the NFB/ONF not only revolted against English



Le Vieux Pays ou Rimbaud est mort

domination, they also revolted against Quebec society's traditional French-Canadianism, with its emphasis on the four pieties of family, religion, language and land.

The person who best personifies the connection between the *cinéma direct* documentary and the new feature film industry that was emerging is Pierre Perrault, who was born in Montreal in 1927. A lawyer by training, a published poet and

7 Jill Forbes, "The French Nouvelle Vague" in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson eds. *The Oxford Guide of Film Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.464

8 Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec* p.345

9 David Clandfield, "From the Picturesque to the Familiar: Films of the French Unit at the NFB (1958-1964) in Seth Feldman, ed. *Take Two* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984) p.113

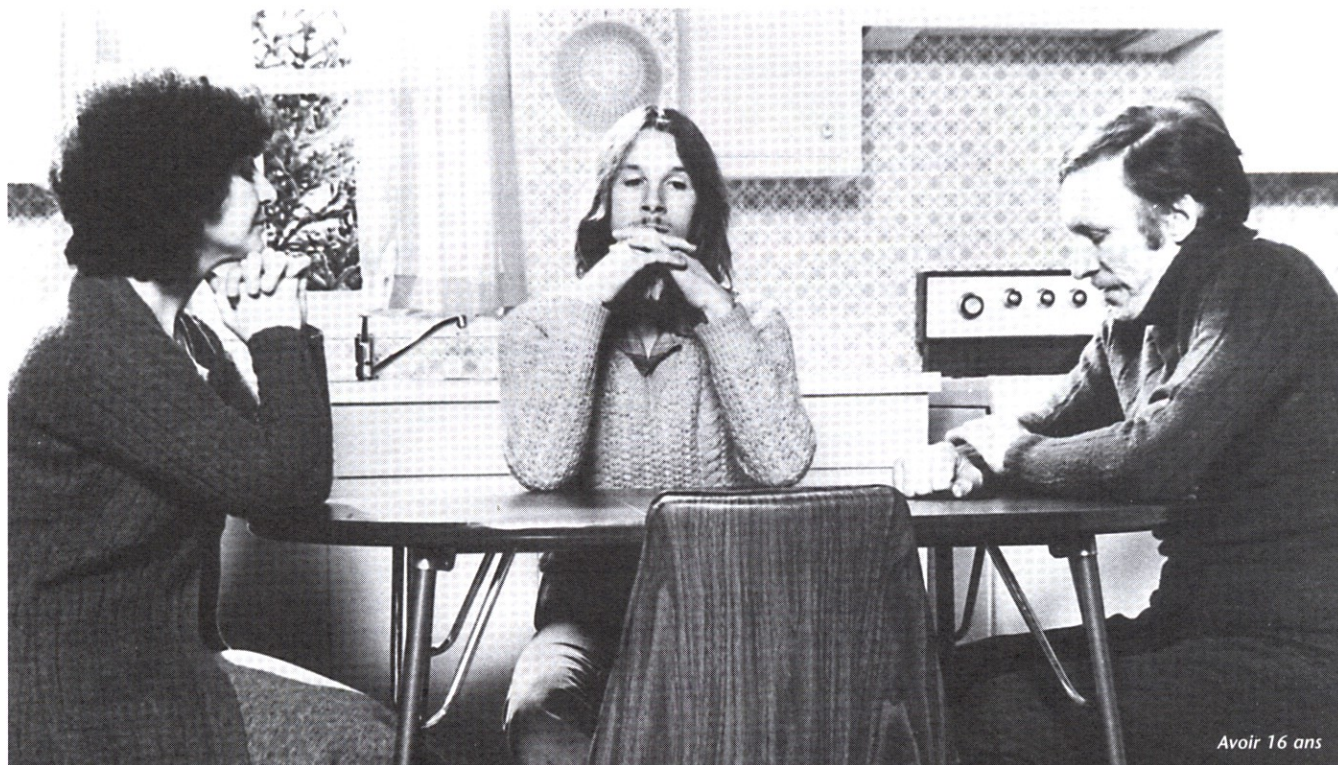
10 Ibid, pp.181-185

11 Marcel Jean, *Le cinéma québécois* (Montreal: Boreal, 1991) p.31

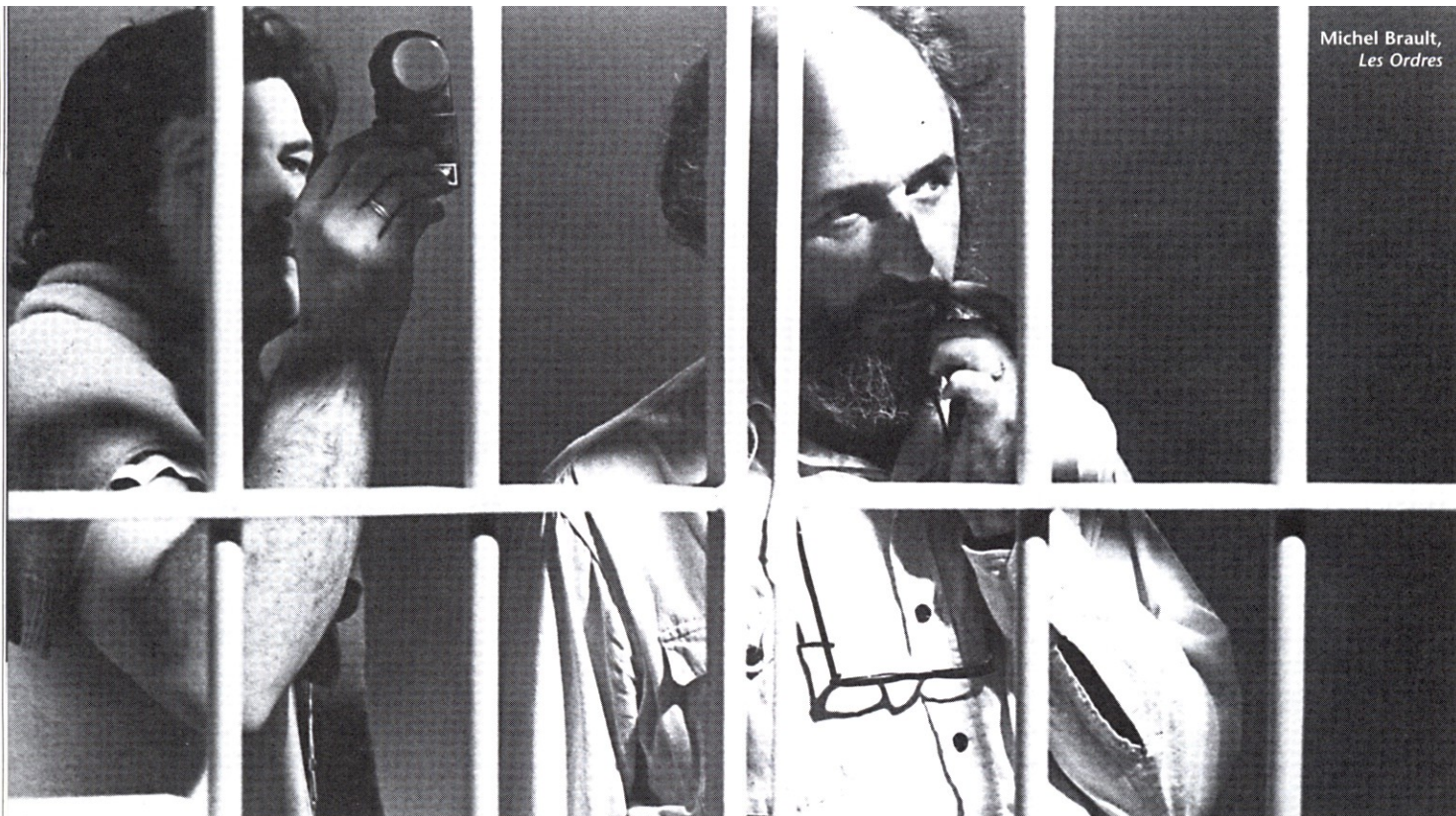
12 Ibid.

13 Bruno Cornellier, "Hollywood et le cinéma québécois (II)" in *Cadragé: Revue de Cinéma* www.cadragé.net p.1

14 Hubert Aquin, "The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada" in Larry Shouldice, ed. *Contemporary Quebec Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) p.74



Avoir 16 ans



Michel Brault,
Les Ordres

a former broadcaster, Perrault represents the introspective, self-examining spirit of the Quebec intellectual. He coined the expression "le cinéma vécu" (living cinema) as a description of what he was trying to achieve in film. He felt that the idea of a living cinema went further than the earlier *cinéma vérité* concept or even the NFB's direct cinema. Living cinema was meant "to present cultural nuances" in a very self-conscious way.¹⁵ Perrault wanted to go "to the people" to capture the essence of their lives and through them the essential spirit of Quebec identity and to do so in a way in which it had never been done before.

"...Quebec artists have seen the vastness of *la côte nord*, the coldness of the winter," writes Peter Harcourt, "and the centrality of the St. Lawrence River as the signposts of their civilization, as the formative symbols of their imagination."¹⁶ It was here, on the St. Lawrence, that Perrault found what he was looking for. It was to the river that he went for inspiration. In 1963 he released the fruits of that journey, the ONF's *Pour la suite du monde*, the first Quebec film to be entered in competition at Cannes. It was named "Film of the Year" at the 1964 Canadian Film Awards and inaugurated a new age in Quebec

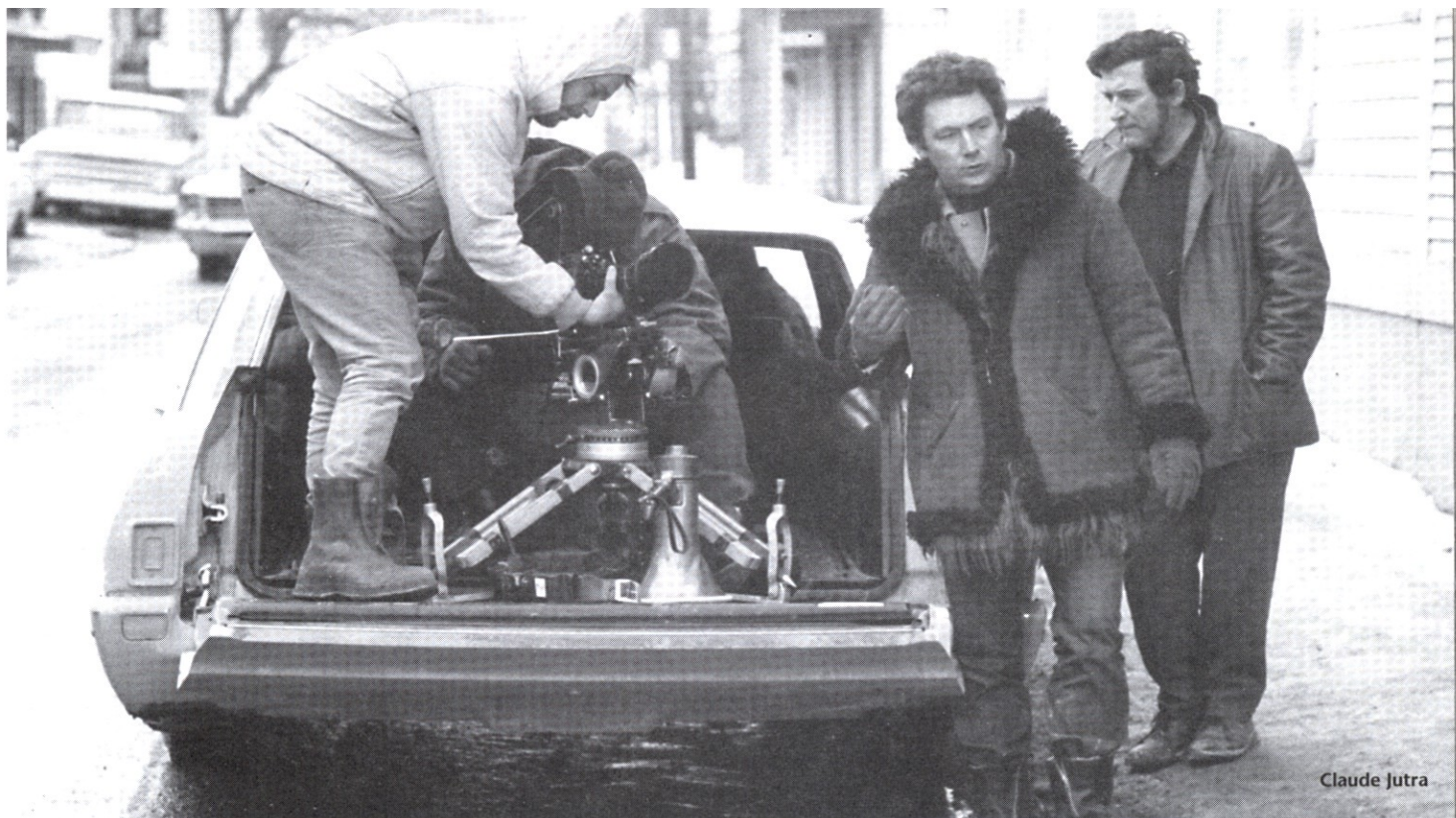
filmmaking, when it joined Claude Jutra's *A tout pendre*, which was named Best Feature film.

Pour la suite du monde (literally 'so the world may continue' but titled *Moontrap* in the NFB's subtitled version) told the story of a community on Ile-aux-Courdres in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and its attempt to revive the tradition of hunting beluga whales.¹⁷ Perrault knew Alexis Tremblay, the patriarch of the family, personally and selected the Tremblays to express his sense of who the Québécois were and what they represented. *Pour la suite du monde* was the first of a trilogy of films about the Ile-aux-Courdres community with the second titled *La Règne du jour* (1967) and the third *Les Voitures d'eau* (1969). When the tiny film crew of Perrault, his co-director and cameraman, Michel Brault, and soundman Marcel Carrière went to this far-away region of Quebec, they let the people speak for themselves so that their worldview could express what it meant to be Québécois. "Un cinéma de la parole" captured the speech and personalities of rustic Quebec using nothing more than a hand-held camera, a microphone and cultural sensitivity and understanding. "Le cinéma vécu représentait pour moi la possibilité de pratiquer une sorte d'écriture orale..." wrote Stéphane-Albert Boulais, who worked with Perrault.¹⁸ This folkloric, ethnographic interest in and focus on "ordinary" speech and the lives of marginalized but rooted people was a way for the urban intelligentsia to find its sense of a distinct national identity.

Quebec critic, Michel Marie, describes Perrault's trilogy as "a kind of archaeology."¹⁹ After Perrault's success with this story of the beluga whale hunt that ends in having the captured whale sent to a marine park in New York, he continued to dig into the importance of the past when he followed the Tremblay family, including Alex's wife, Marie (mother of 16) to France, where the Tremblays try to see if there is any resem-



Les Ordres



Claude Jutra

blance between themselves and the people of their distant ancestral home. *Le Règne du jour* (The Realm of Time) was followed by the concluding film, *Les Voitures d'eau* (River Schooners), which had the island community build an old-fashioned wood fishing schooner of the kind that had once been the mainstay of the economy, but which is no longer used.

His approach won as much criticism as it did praise. Film historian, David Clandfield, considered it a form of "liberal paternalism"—this going out and filming ordinary people and making something special of them.²⁰ The idea that filmmakers were elitists when they engaged with simple people was also propounded by Yves Picard, a Quebec film writer, who considered the whole project of creating a distinct Quebec cinema to be the project of "une élite francophone."²¹ This ideologically-motivated elite wanted to create a communal identity that would encompass Quebecers and validate their project of independence. But there were other Quebec critics like Paul Warren, who were sympathetic to this work and believed that Perrault's films were "the fullest expression of Quebec cinema and the clearest line of demarcation from the cinema of English Canada."²²

Perrault's rather somber style and his bringing forth of a hauntingly austere cinematography imbued with elegiac reverence (beauty mixed with sadness) was something that Quebec audiences and others found engaging, even entrancing. An American historian of Quebec film considered *Pour la suite du monde* to have "...some of the most beautiful photography [Michel Brault] in all cinema."²³ But the beauty had a purpose. It was an expression of an aesthetic that sought to create a beguiling artistry that would give ancestral heritage a mythological, and therefore, a political power.²⁴ Prominent Quebec film historian, Yves Lever, in an early book wrote a chapter on Perrault which he titled "Pierre Perrault et la construction du

québec libre."²⁵ He considered Perrault to be creating a new sense of Quebec identity that fit with the project of independence that was then gathering strength. When Perrault and Brault teamed up again to make a political documentary about

15 Peter Harcourt, "Pierre Perrault and *Le cinéma vécu*" in Feldman ed. *Take Two*, p.125

16 Ibid. p.130

17 The film with English subtitles was re-released by the NFB in 2001 under the English title "Of Whales, the Moon and Men." Originally it was titled *The Moontrap*.

18 Stéphane-Albert Boulais, "Le cinéma vécu de l'intérieur: mon expérience avec Pierre Perrault" in

P. Veronneau, Michel Dorland and Seth Feldman, eds. *Dialogue: Cinéma canadien et québécois* (Montreal: Mediatexte, 1987) p.171.

19 Michel Marie, "Singulière de l'oeuvre de Perrault" in Veronneau et al. *Dialogue*, p.157

20 David Clandfield, "Ritual and Recital: The Perrault Project" in Feldman ed. *Take Two*, p.146.

21 Yves Picard, "Les succès du cinéma québécois" in Veronneau et al. *Dialogue*, p.104

22 English synopsis of Paul Warren, "Les Québécois et le cinéma" in Veronneau et al. *Dialogue*, p.110.

23 Janis L. Pallister, *The Cinema of Quebec: Masters in Their Own House* (Madison: Assoc. University Presses, 1995) p.43.

24 Michel Larouche, "Pierre Perrault et la 'parlure' du Québec" in Michel Larouche, *L'aventure du cinéma québécois en France* p.147.

25 Yves Lever, *Cinéma et société québécois* (Montreal: Editions du Jour, 1972) pp.21-55.



Kamouraska



a francophone student struggle in New Brunswick, *L'Acadie, l'Acadie* (1971) the political dimension came to the forefront. Later Perrault also did a tetralogy of films on the Abitibi regime of Quebec, which were less enthusiastically received, an indication that cinematic and political taste had moved on.

Perrault's collaborator, Michel Brault (1928-) was the creator of the evocative cinematography of *Pour la suite du monde* and a practitioner of direct cinema, who brought the independence project to the forefront with his major film, *Les Ordres* (1974). Brault had been part of the scene since the 1950s when he worked with Gilles Groulx on the breakthrough direct cinema documentary, *Les Raquetteurs* (1958) and later with Claude

Jutra on his award-winning feature, *A tout pendre* (1964). Brault represented the synthesis of aesthetic genius and political commitment that gave Quebec cinema its energy in this period.

Les Ordres is a film about the imposition of the War Measures Act in October 1970, when the British Trade Commissioner was kidnapped by the FLQ (Front de Liberation du Québec) and Quebec's Labor Minister, Pierre LaPorte, was killed. Hundreds were rounded up and jailed without trail or warrant because the federal government claimed there was an apprehended insurrection. None of those arrested were ever charged. Simply being associated with the cause of Quebec independence was sufficient to be a target for the police and the military that occupied Montreal. Brault's film, using documentary techniques, brought the whole event to the screen. An important French film, *Battle of Algiers* (1966) served as an inspirational precursor. It had been nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. The realistic treatment of the independence struggle of the Algerians against French colonial occupation in the 1950s made the documentary mode the technique of choice for fictionalizing political struggles that involved violence and terror. The Greek filmmaker, Costa-Gavras, used the same approach in dealing with South American revolutionary movements in *State of Siege* (1974).

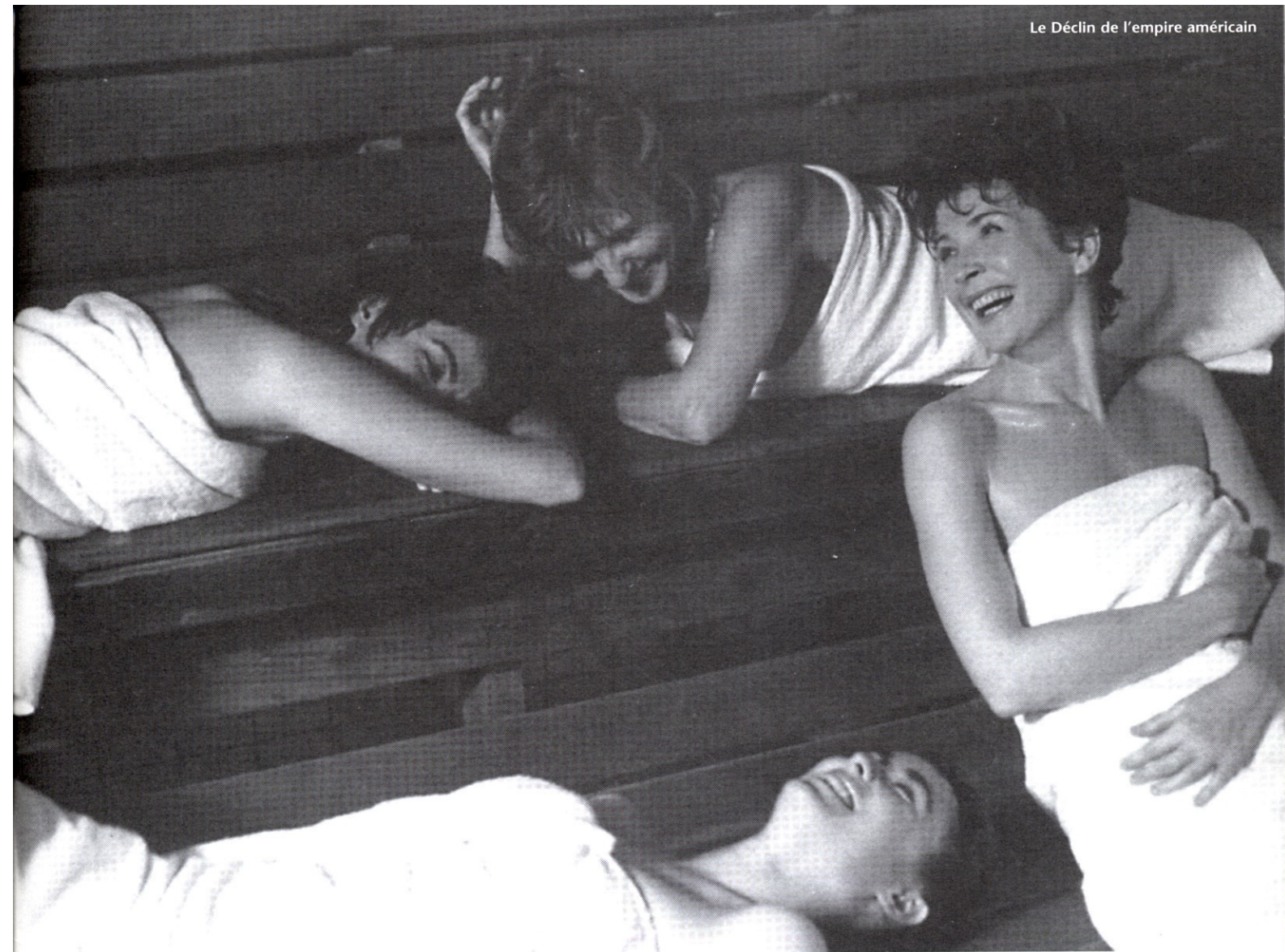
Brault was the auteur director of *Les Ordres*, whose script presented his own interpretation of what was happening to Quebec society. The Canadian Film Awards chose it as Film of the Year and Best Feature Film and the film was honored at Cannes.

Brault's stark treatment of what happened to five characters in Montreal when the War Measures Act was proclaimed expressed his opposition to the federal government's actions. "I wanted to give a voice to the people who had suffered the horror of this," he said in an interview many years after the event.²⁶ The political nature of the film came through when the NFB Commissioner, a political appointee of the Cabinet,

vetoed the making of the film even though the French program committee had approved it.²⁷ A few years later Brault was able to get CFDC funding to make the film independently. While English Canadians found the film controversial, committed *indépendantistes*, like Pierre Vallières considered it "untruthful" because it did not portray the resistance to Anglo occupation, instead focusing on the passivity of the victims.²⁸

Brault has been called "the finest cinematographer Canada has produced" and while he did make other feature films in the 1990s (to little acclaim) his auteur reputation is based on *Les Ordres*.²⁹ When he was interviewed by *The Globe and Mail* in 1999 at the age of 72 he came across as a man from the past, a figure associated with the "cinema of contestation" that was no longer





relevant to Quebec politics, as it had been thirty years earlier, or to cinema in general, which had by the 1980s lost its political edge. In a sense the documentary mode and direct cinema that fit so well with the spirit of national liberation that enflamed so much of the world at the time had become a victim of the times. A film like *Les Ordres*, which *The Globe and Mail* reporter, who interviewed Brault, ranked as "one of the two or three greatest movies made in Canada" was not available in any video rental store in Canada's largest city. And yet Perrault's nostalgic classic was about to be re-released by the NFB.³⁰ Ethnography had won out over political criticism.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre was barely twenty years old when the sixties began. In 1965 he made three low-budget full-length films and twenty years later he had made 19 features. Lefebvre did not go through the documentary phase that the other Quebec directors did, though he did do the occasional NFB production after this reputation was established. Instead he was baptized directly into the mysteries of feature film, which allowed him to develop his own style of filmmaking. *Le Révolutionnaire* (1965) was his inaugural feature. It mocks a group of Quebecers wanting to create a Cuban-style insurrection in Quebec. A later film, *Les vieux pays on Rimbaud est mort* (The Old Country Where Rimbaud Died), which he made in

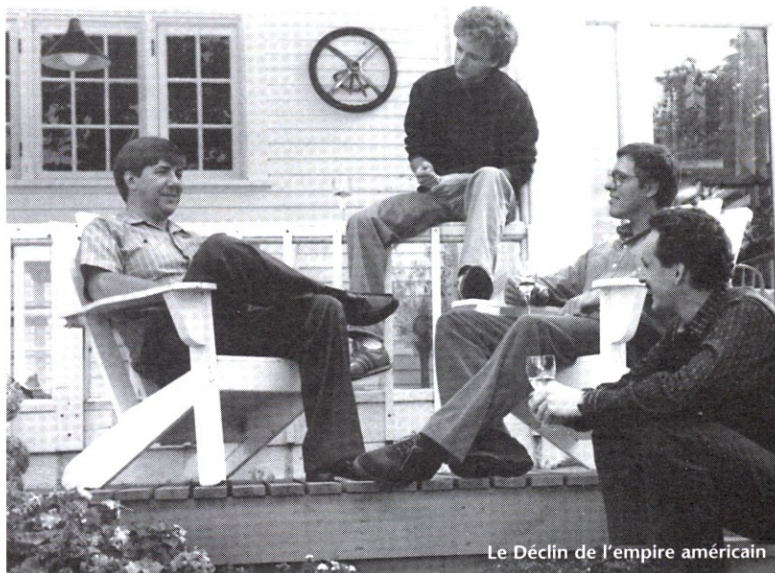
26 Ray Conlogue, "For Michel Brault, the era is over" *The Globe and Mail* Nov.19, 1990, p.R3

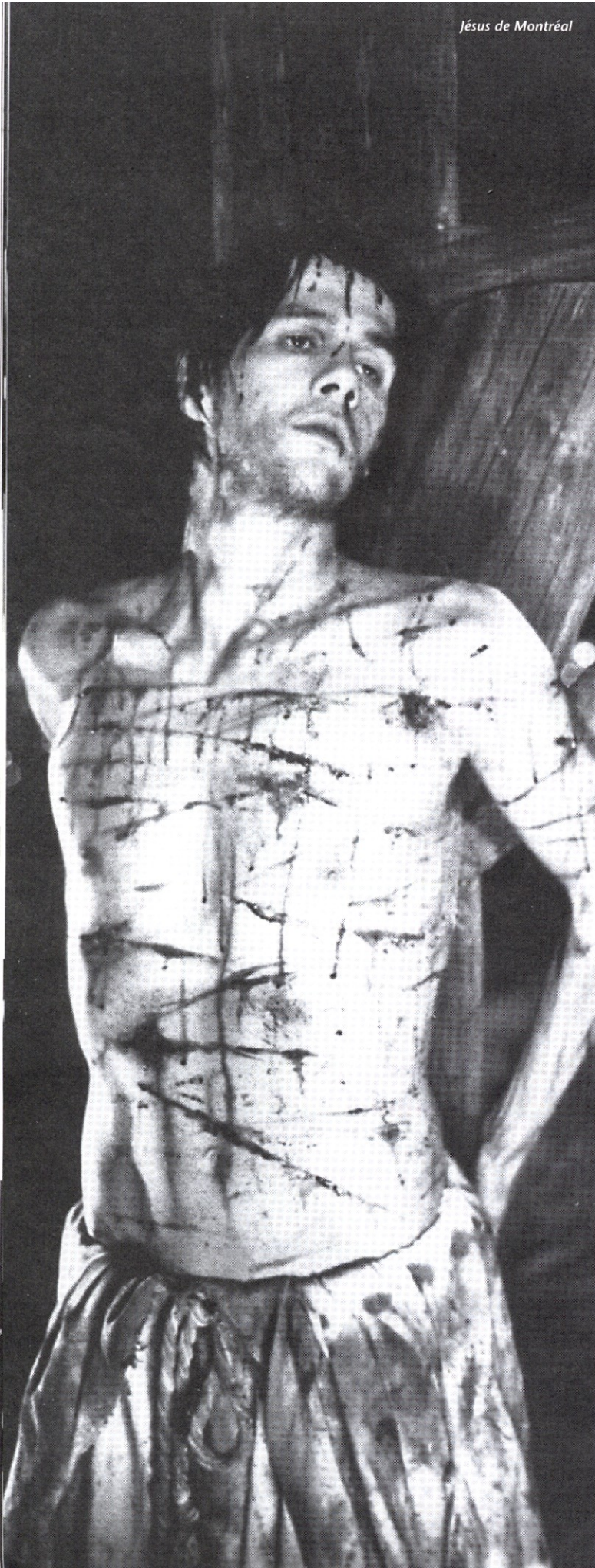
27 Martin Knelman, *This is Where We Came In; The Career and Character of Canadian film*. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977) p.31

28 Pierre Vallières, "An Account by a Privileged Hostage of *Les Ordres: Brault Has Missed His Shot*" in S. Feldman and J. Nelson ed. *Canadian Film Reader* (Toronto: PMA Associates, 1977) p.266.

29 Marshall Delaney, "Artists in the Shadows: Some Notable Canadian Movies" in Feldman, *Take Two*, p.4.

30 Conlogue, "For Michel Brault, the era is over" *The Globe and Mail*, p.R3





1977, deals with a Quebecker, who goes to France (like Perrault's Tremblays) in search of his identity. In both cases Lefebvre's sense of politics is challenging and disquieting. Reflecting on his early films, Lefebvre stated in 2001: "Even 35 years ago I thought we had to be careful not to become our own colonizers."³¹

He was a social critic of his own society and his film style went against the grain of most filmmaking. He favored the long shot and dwelt for extended periods on a single situation with very little action in the frame. People found his films very slow. No wonder none of his films ever had a theatrical release in English Canada, though his ability to make films on next to nothing allowed him to make new ones in spite of their style. For example, *Q-bec my Love* (1970) cost a mere \$25,000 to produce and grossed \$140,000, of which Lefebvre was paid \$7,000.³¹

Peter Harcourt, the English Canadian film scholar and critic, who has spent a great deal of time coming to understand Lefebvre's work, believes that his films are primarily about people's relationship to the environment they inhabit—be it a room, a city or a marriage. "The environment is as much a part of the content of the film as anything the characters do or say," he writes.³³ This is more than just the figure in the landscape concept. It refers to the way a person or a people inhabit their many spaces and the influences on that environment that mould them into what they have become. Harcourt believes that Lefebvre's films insist that the audience enter into the life of his characters no matter how simple, casual and uneventful it may be, because every moment is a human one and worthy of contemplation and compassion.³⁴ This aesthetic may appeal to cinephiles but it has great difficulty in pricking the Hollywood film and American television bubble that most Canadians inhabit. No wonder, Canadian film scholar, Seth Feldman, described Lefebvre as being "amongst the most foreign of foreign directors" for English Canadian audiences.³⁵

When Lefebvre addressed the limitations of the nationalist project in his films he spoke directly to Quebec issues, but when he expressed the universal need to slow down and appreciate what really matters in a life, he was making a universal statement. If the end result was rather melancholic, this was simply the flip side of the fervent hopes for a new Quebec, which (people imagined it was realized after the 1976 election of the Parti Québécois) turned out to be a chimera, a secular antithesis to the old age of incense, as Peter Harcourt, calls it.³⁶ The materialism and commercialism of the new Quebec was to trouble other filmmakers as well, but there were some who indulged it.

Gilles Carle was "the only Canadian director to consistently produce money-making commercial films."³⁷ He began in 1965 with *La vie heureuse de Léopold Z* (The Happy Life of Leopold Z) and went on to make another 15 features before 2000. In 1998 he directed and co-wrote an autobiographical documentary about his career titled *Moi, j'me fais mon cinéma* (1998). Carle was 37 when he made *Leopold Z*, so he was not the child prodigy that was Lefebvre, but he was very aware of what made for a popular film. *Leopold Z* is the story of a hapless Montreal snowplow driver at Christmas, who struggles

valiantly to fulfill all his pressing duties from clearing streets to shopping and going to church. Although influenced by a personal need for social caricature or satire, Carle was usually a tender humorist who loved irony. People generally went to his movies to laugh and enjoy themselves and Carle knew what kind of comedy worked for Quebec audiences. Films like *Les Mâles* (1971) were full of buffoonery and farce. Carle described his ability to reach Quebecers with his films as coming from his "obedient compliance to the deeply rooted logic of our subculture", which meant he had to identify with John Wayne and the Pope simultaneously.³⁸ Because he was so attuned to popular culture he made a feature film that also ran on television about Quebec's most famous fictional family, the Plouffes, whose 1940s world was popular first as a radio serial and then as a television series, including an English version in the 1960s. If anyone could capture the absurdities of the traditional extended francophone family it was Carle.

Creation of a popular cinema for Quebecers was not just the work of populists like Carle. It was also the work of pornographers. The Canadian Film Development Corporation funded a half-dozen of these marvels in its first few years. Termed "Maple Leaf Porno" by *Variety* magazine these films attracted Quebecers in droves!³⁹ Denis Heroux and Claude Fournier were the main instigators. Heroux's first excursion into soft-core porn was *Valérie* (1969), which was a black and white film made for under \$100,000 that grossed \$2 million after screenings in 40 countries.⁴⁰ The story of a 20-year old orphan raised in a convent who becomes a topless dancer and then a prostitute was the perfect vehicle for the audience's desire for nudity. It was the best-attended Quebec film since the shocking *La Petite Aurore l'enfant martyre* of the early 50s. Heroux then made *L'initiation* for \$180,000, which grossed \$2.5 million.⁴¹ Fournier's *Deux femmes en or* was made for \$218,000 and grossed \$4 million.⁴² These films displayed a European sense of sexual explicitness, which was now tolerated in Quebec's new uncensored environment. It was considered the age of sexual liberation, which, of course, was applauded by male audiences.

Out of this diverse and hurly-burly atmosphere, where political and art films competed with soft core porn, arose two directors whose work has come to signify Quebec cinema to the rest of Canada—Claude Jutra and Denys Arcand. When Claude Jutra's body was discovered on the shores of the St. Lawrence in 1987, it had been almost two decades since his masterpiece, *Mon Oncle Antoine* had been made. He had never again been able to create something as evocative and full of symbolic meaning as that NFB-sponsored feature film. He had been a feature filmmaker for five years when he began working on *Mon Oncle Antoine*. His first feature, an independent production titled *A tout pendre* (Take It All) had won the Grand Prize at the Montreal Film Festival in 1963 and the Feature Film of the Year Award at the 16th Annual Canadian Film Awards in 1964. *A tout pendre* was an autobiographical study in the spirit and style of direct cinema and French New Wave in which Jutra and his former girlfriend play themselves. Prior to this he had been active in documentary film production at the NFB during the 1950s.

Film critic Martin Knelman described Jutra as a man of ambivalence, complex irony and a sly, understated humor.⁴³ It was this personality that Knelman felt allowed Jutra to tackle "the psychological claustrophobia of a rigid society that defeats people."⁴⁴ Jutra gained international experience between 1957 and 1961 when he went to France and associated with various French film personalities and worked on their projects. His aesthetic was formed first by the NFB and then the new cinema of France. In this he reflected an essential Quebec cultural position—a relationship with two dominating and opposing cultures with Quebec standing nervously in the middle. Out of this tension grew a distinct Quebec approach.

Jutra was acknowledged as part of the new wave of Quebec film making of the 1960s because of his contemporary topics, but when he moved away from that edginess he ran into criticism in Quebec. It began with *Mon Oncle Antoine* and reached a crescendo with his film of Anne Hébert's 1970 gothic novel, *Kamouraska*, set in 19th century rural Quebec. Cinematic examinations of the past were either considered nostalgic or a reactionary interest in an old-fashioned, long surpassed identity. What relevance could a film about an asbestos-mining community of the 1940s (when Quebec was living in the 'dark ages' of Duplessis's Union Nationale government) have to the new Quebec these critics asked? Since the Quiet Revolution was about modernization and rejection of old-style French Canadianism, a film that highlighted past failings was suspect. Besides a simple, old-fashioned narrative with no overt political content would not be well-received by intellectuals coming out of the trauma of the October Crisis.

In contrast Canadian critics were apoplectic with delight at this light comedy that seemed to reveal the soul of Quebec. Was this just a replay of the colonial mentality in which English Canada feasted on the antiquated French-Canadian image that pictured Quebecers as constructs of family, farm, church and the French language? Or was it relief at finding a Quebec film that wasn't an in-your-face political statement of Canadian oppression? Was the new Quebec so hard to take that the old Quebec was comfortable and soothing? Bruce Elder, an insightful Canadian film commentator of deep aesthetic concerns, actually views *Mon Oncle Antoine* as a film of political significance.⁴⁵ Since the asbestos mining strikes of

31 Ray Conlogue, "Tilting at the U.S. film windmill" *The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 21, 2001 p. R3.

32 Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, p. 287

33 Peter Harcourt, "Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Vidéaste" Monograph. (Toronto International Film Festival Group, 2001) p. 21

34 Ibid. p. 27

35 Intro to Peter Harcourt, "The Old and the New" in Feldman, *Take Two*, p. 169

36 Ibid. p. 48

37 James Leach, "The Sins of Gilles Carle" in Feldman, *Take Two*, p. 160

38 Martin Knelman, *This is Where We Came In* p. 70

39 Ted Madger, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) p. 136

40 Jean, *Le cinéma Québécois*, p. 69

41 Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, p. 305

42 Ibid. p. 306

43 Martin Knelman, "Claude Jutra in Exile" in D. Fetherling, ed. *Documents in Canadian Film* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1988) p. 216

44 Ibid.

45 Bruce Elder, "Claude Jutra's 'Mon Oncle Antoine'" in Feldman and Nelson, *Canadian Film Reader*, pp. 194-199. Originally published in *Descant*, Spring, 1973.



1949 and 1952 were a reflection of the new post-war spirit that eventually became the Quiet Revolution, a film about that period, yet not overtly about the strikes, is a way of presenting the confused and uncertain birth of a new age.

Mon Oncle Antoine was based on a screenplay by Clément Perron, a Quebec playwright, filmmaker and screenwriter, who knew the asbestos region personally and who remembered the incidents depicted in the film. The film was shot by the cinematographic master Michel Brault. It is a coming-of-age story of a boy (Benoit), who works in his uncle Antoine's general store in a Quebec town in the asbestos region. It is winter and Christmas is at hand. Through the eyes of Benoit we see the life of his insular society unfold in a way that exposes both its personal hypocrisy and its exploitative social structure, including the English ruling class. Religion, sex and death are the main themes. The climax of the film comes when Benoit accompanies his inebriated uncle to pick up the corpse of another boy, who has died in the countryside. The film is rich in metaphor and symbol (coffins, barrels of nails, trampled wedding gowns, Nativity scenes, etc). In fact, a major study of the film and its director claims it is an excellent example of the 'cinema of fable.'⁴⁶ In *Mon Oncle Antoine* there is not only a particular historical period in Quebec history that is described, but an exposition of the essential features of Quebec culture and its identity. Jutra understood this when he said the film was a statement of his own "sociological and cultural reality."⁴⁷ It was of a par-

ticular historical moment and how that moment reflected on Quebec's "eternal" soul.

The older generation is presented as one that is either trapped in its oppression (Jos Poulin, the asbestos worker finds no escape in winter logging work), or else one that simply feeds off its progeny (the father who has indentured his own daughter to work in Antoine's store). The film is saying that the old Quebec is only good for replicating an endless subordination to English Canada. But Benoit, who represents the new generation, offers hope that a new consciousness exists and that one day, when it matures, it will create the kind of Quebec that Jutra was experiencing in the sixties.

Because the film is presented in an affectionate, delicate and old-fashioned way, it became the perfect interpretive vehicle for English Canadian audiences.⁴⁸ It provided them with the charming depiction of rural life that fit their stereotype of Quebec, but with enough symbolic resonance to see that the stereotype was completely irrelevant to today's Quebec.⁴⁹ What makes *Mon Oncle Antoine* so endearing is its universal aspect rather than its historical accuracy. The theme of growing up and realizing one's sexual nature, the revelation of adult hypocrisy and misdemeanors, and the constant struggle between life and death make sense to all people regardless of their culture.

Most Canadians who saw *Mon Oncle Antoine* viewed it when it was broadcast by CBC television.⁵⁰ That the film was con-

sidered suitable for a television audience was a sign of its universal appeal. Even though some might conclude that Jutra was not fully appreciated in Quebec (for a time he exiled himself to English Canada to make films), there was an undercurrent of understanding that only needed time to appear. In 1999 the Quebec movie industry broke with the Toronto-based Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, that operates the Genie Awards (successor to the Canadian Film Awards), to create its own Oscar-style awards show in which the awards are named in honor of Claude Jutra—the Jutra Awards.

Denys Arcand was to the 1980s what Jutra had been to the 1970s—an interpreter of Quebec that was embraced by all of Canada and beyond. He began his career at the NFB in the mid-sixties but ran into difficulty with his 1970 documentary on the textile industry in Quebec. *On est au coton* was to be released in 1970, but it was made available only in 1976 because of corporate objections. Meanwhile Arcand directed his first feature in 1972 (*La Maudite Galette*) which he co-wrote. His auteur debut came with *Gina* in 1974. He continued as an auteur with *Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe* in 1984. It was however his next two films that created his reputation as Quebec's leading director of the 1980s. The 1986 *Le*

46 Jim Leach, *Claude Jutra: Filmmaker* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999) p.124/

47 Ibid, p.136

48 These adjectives are used by Martin Knelman, *Where We Came In*, p.48

49 Elder, "Claude Jutra's 'Mon Oncle Antoine'" in Feldman and Nelseon, *Canadian Film Reader*, p.199.

50 Knelman's "Claude Jutra in Exile" in Fetherling, *Documents in Canadian Film*, p.224 mentions a figure of 3 million.

Pour la suite de monde



Pour la suite de monde



La vie heureuse de Léopold

Déclin de l'empire américain (The Decline of the American Empire) was an international success, which was followed three years later by *Jésus de Montréal*. *The Decline of the American Empire* won the International Critics Prize at Cannes in 1987 and was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film Category. The film garnered 9 Genies, including Best Director and Best Screenplay. It had a decent budget of \$1.85 million with Canadian and Quebec government agencies putting up the bulk of the money.⁵¹ Because of its profile (and provocative title) it received international distribution in three versions—original French, a version subtitled in English and a version dubbed into English.

The film is a simple story of a group of middle-class academics, intellectuals and their spouses who gather in the countryside one weekend. The setting is contemporary and the film is primarily a discussion of middle-aged issues of sexuality and fidelity. Arcand used his documentary experience to heighten the underlying tensions in the dialogue. Some have considered the film to be modeled after the 1983 American film, *The Big Chill*, in which a group of friends are re-united for a funeral of one of their own and the replay of their past relations.⁵² *Decline* is a meditation on the direction of Quebec society after the successes of the Quiet Revolution, but it is not a positive interpretation of the new secularism. "I was taught at the university to take a very gloomy view of French-Canadian history" admits Arcand.⁵³ This sense of gloom pervades *Decline* and it provides what might be considered a very Catholic view of human affairs—that human nature is unchangeable and per-

manently flawed and that historical progress is an allusion, especially in terms of spirituality.

Martin Knelman believes that Arcand has a highly developed sense of social justice and that while he may "express a revolutionary rage and sense of betrayal by the established order" he does not have the revolutionary's conviction that things can be changed."⁵⁴ This sensibility is best expressed in *Jésus of Montréal*. The film was written, directed and co-edited by Arcand and so is surely the deepest expression of his Catholic consciousness and its subconscious (he was raised in a strict Catholic home and educated by Jesuits). At Cannes *Jésus* won the Jury Prize and another Oscar nomination in the Best Foreign Film category. At the Genies it was awarded the Best Motion Picture award, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay plus acting and cinematography awards. The story was inspired by an actor who had auditioned for *Decline* and told Arcand of the degrading life he and his fellow actors had to lead in commercials and porno films, while at the same time performing in the Passion Play for tourists.

Because it spoke to his Catholic upbringing, Arcand took the story and created a masterpiece in which the slender body, piercing eyes and soft-spokenness of the actor (Lothaire Bluteau) who plays Jesus in the Easter pageant turns him into a Christ-figure in contemporary Montreal. The artificiality of the Passion Play is contrasted with the searing reality of the actor's contemporary life. Various events that engage the actor in the streets, homes and commercial towers of city are contemporary versions of events described in the Gospels, climax-

ing with an organ-transplant that is meant to mimic the Resurrection. The film is suffused with Christian imagery and metaphor so that the actor's life parallels that of the biblical Jesus. Only someone steeped in Christian mythology could produce such a critical yet sensitive portrayal. For some it was too radical a portrayal and a scandalous anti-clerical provocation.⁵⁵ Arcand responded by claiming his film was a critique of contemporary Quebec society and its religious institutions.⁵⁶ Informed critics like Pierre Véronneau consider it a triumph of postmodernism.⁵⁷

Because of his new international fame Arcand was enticed to make English language films. The first of these was *Love and Human Remains* (1993) a dark portrayal of urban life based on a provocative and disturbing play by Brad Fraser, an Alberta playwright whose work was considered sexually explicit and full of tough language and attitudes. The film failed at the box office. Arcand then signed a deal with Canada's leading film production house, Alliance-Atlantis, where he wrote and directed his second English feature, *Stardom* (2000), a satire on the television and fashion industries. It also did poorly. It would seem that one can take the boy out of Quebec but one can't take Quebec out of the boy. Until Arcand finds a renewed voice for himself in francophone Quebec, his star will have shone brightest in the 1980s.

The rise of the Quebec auteur and the birth of a viable feature film industry in Quebec are rooted in the successes of the independence movement. Films that explored Quebec's identity paralleled what was happening in literature, music and drama. The joual-loaded urban plays of Michel Tremblay, the folksy novels of Roch Carrier or the deep dark visions of Anne Hébert (*Kamouraska*) or Maïre Claire Blais (*Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*) and the popularity of *chansonniers* like Gilles Vignault and the Quebec pop star Charlebois were the new content for Quebec culture and the context for its cinema. The ruling Parti Québécois's emphasis on the French language as the language of life and work in the province legitimized francophone cinema; the CFDC and its successor Telefilm Canada provided financial support; and the desire to foster a sense of distinct identity made artists of all kinds respected and admired. Besides, Hollywood was not threatened by Quebec cinema. After 1974 Canada provided about 10 percent of the world market for Hollywood products and Quebec represented 20 percent of 10 percent or 2%.⁵⁸ Of course, Quebec cinema's share of the Quebec market was much less than Hollywood's and its films hardly ever made it to English Canada.⁵⁹

Because of television and home video viewing, movie theatre capacity fell dramatically from 1970 to 1992.⁶⁰ Yet the Quebec industry's products were reaching a wide enough audience to be felt as a cultural influence of some importance. What kind of influence was this? Film historian Yves Lever believes that Quebec cinema of this period was overly preoccupied with a kind of cultural solipsism that sought to dig into Quebec's collective psyche with a merciless judgmental honesty.⁶¹ The result was the birth of a national cinema. Although Quebec audiences had been subjected to "une colonisation systématique de son imaginaire" they still hungered to see expressions of their life on the screen.⁶² That fact that the industry

produced everything from avant-garde art house films to mainstream comedies indicated how broad the audience was.

Nevertheless, one can argue that what had been born in Quebec in the 1960s was a *quasi-national* cinema because the independence project had not been realized in spite of two referenda-1980 and 1996. Until sovereignty is achieved, Quebec's claim to a distinct *national* cinema on par with that of France, Germany or Italy remains compromised. Operating in a North American context and influenced by French, American, and in a certain way, Canadian cinema, the cinema of Quebec is characterized by a certain ambivalence about itself.⁶³ What is its place in an international context? The recognition that Denys Arcand received in the late 1980s was a sign that Quebec had something distinctive to say to those outside the province. One may conclude that Quebec cinema in the 1960-1990 period, while initially influenced by France's New Wave and direct cinema, developed sufficient critical mass to go in its own direction. French or American or even Canadian feature films of the same period are dissimilar from the Quebec product. So the ambivalence about its status is more of an internal questioning and uncertainty than it is an objective one. It may be that the question about Quebec's political future, either inside or outside Canada, remains disquietingly imbedded in the cinema of the Quebec auteur.

The cultural offensive that post-Duplessis Quebec launched in 1960 did succeed in creating a powerful cinematic entity, but the failure of the Parti Québécois to create a sovereign Quebec left that entity questioning its own identity. Even so, considering that Canadian film at the same time was much more defensive and scattered, the achievement of Quebec in creating a cadre of auteur directors who received Canada-wide and even international recognition, moved Canada's film identity to a whole new level of now being a global player, albeit a small one.

51 Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, p.323

52 Adrian Van Den Hoven, "The Decline of the American Empire in a North-American Perspective" in Joseph Donohoe ed. *Essays on Quebec Cinema* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991) p.145.

53 Judy Wright and Debbie Magidson, "Making Films for Your Own People: An Interview with Denys Arcand" in Feldman and Nelson eds. *Canadian Film Reader* p.219.

54 Knelman, *This is Where We Came In* p. 80.

55 Michèle Garneau et Pierre Véronneau, "Un cinéma <de genre> révélateur d'une inquiétante américanité québécoise" in Larouche, *L'aventure du cinéma québécois en France*, p.201

56 Interview with Denys Arcand, www.sundancechannel.com/focus/arcand/5.html.

57 Garneau et Véronneau, "Un cinéma <de genre>..." in Larouche, *L'aventure du cinéma québécois en France*, p.202

58 Lever, *Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec*, p.393

59 Ibid. Lever claims that in the 1980s, 80% of screen time in Quebec belonged to Hollywood, 10% to French films and the Quebec portion varied from 4% to 10%. When it was at a high of 10%, 1.5 million tickets were sold in the province to view Quebec films. P.416

60 Ibid. From 189,553 seats in 326 theatres in 1970 to 81,765 seats in 250 theatres in 1992. P.417

61 Ibid. p. 373

62 Ibid. p.475

63 Bruno Cornéliier, "Hollywood et le cinéma québécois (1)" *Cadragé: Le magazine du cinéma international*, www.cadragé.net.

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THE PARTY'S OVER: *Rollercoaster*

By **Robin Wood**



Prelude: 'Efforts' and 'small films'

Recently, in Toronto, a rare event: a filmmaker actually had the nerve to attack the reviewers for not liking his film. The filmmaker was David Weaver (who once long ago wrote for *CineAction*); the film was his first feature, *Century Hotel*. Weaver's shocking, unprecedented and of course totally unjustifiable behaviour produced a response that was surprising only in its length and obsessiveness (had, perhaps, a nerve been touched somewhere?): Geoff Pevere (who also once long ago wrote for *CineAction*) managed to take up almost a full page of the *Toronto Star* in his determination to put this young upstart in his place. (Was I alone in finding his response insufferably smug in its lofty scorn and condescension, its transparent desire to push a young and ambitious Canadian filmmaker back into the dark and lowly place he should never have dared peek out of? But then, I like *Century Hotel*...).

One of Weaver's misdemeanours was to suggest that the reviews would have been different if the film had been French.

This elicited further witticisms from Pevere, but I agree with Weaver: if *Century Hotel* had been made in France and had subtitles, the critical verdict might have been roughly the same, but the tone would have been quite different and far more respectful. I have noticed on several occasions a tendency in the reviews or the 'new releases' listings to describe Canadian movies as 'efforts' ('the latest Canadian effort'; *Century Hotel*, made in Toronto, was announced as a 'local effort'). I cannot recall ever seeing this term applied to films from elsewhere (The Wind Shall Carry Us as 'the latest Iranian effort'? *Harry Potter* as 'the new Hollywood effort'?).

Canadian films (unless directed by David Cronenberg, or perhaps Atom Egoyan in his later works) are also categorized instantly as 'small', and I think we should ask ourselves exactly what this conveys, and by what criterion smallness or bigness can be gauged. The answer is clear: 'small' here has nothing whatever to do with subject matter, quality or ambition; it has to do exclusively with money, and is yet another proof of



our insidious and all-pervasive corruption by capitalist values. Pevere was very positive about Bruce Sweeney's *Last Wedding*, yet he referred to it repeatedly as 'small'. The film is a devastating attack on the institution of marriage, its title to be taken literally: 'I say there shall be no more marriages...' (Bruce Sweeney as Hamlet). Is this a 'small' subject? It is offered as a bomb placed and exploded under the very heart of our culture. But of course it did not cost very much (relatively speaking) to make, and lacks stars, spectacle and 'special effects'. For me, *Last Wedding* is a very big film indeed; *Harry Potter* is a small film.

I wonder how many people reading this article have even heard of *Rollercoaster* (or, perhaps, are expecting a critical exploration of the 1977 Sensurround 'effort', a disaster film in every sense, in which case I shall disappoint them). Scott Smith's film is also 'small': its budget was not exactly enormous, and I assume its cast of six (uniformly marvellous) actors were each paid somewhat less than the ten million nowadays

taken for granted by major Hollywood stars, though they give performances as good, if not better. And the film is 'merely' about teenagers, our culture's disenfranchised, disenchanted and desperate members, and (more specifically) about teen suicide: a 'small' subject? I have to suppose it is, for most people. We read brief references to it in the newspapers but nothing is ever done so presumably no one cares, it not occurring to them that these same teenagers (the ones who survive) represent the future of our culture. But then, does anyone care about that either? Those who believe in the reality of global warming (notice, Torontonians, that it is, at time of writing, the beginning of December and the temperature is still well above zero) and the devastation of the environment appear to be in such a minority that they feel helpless, while the rest have long ago succumbed to the capitalist lure of 'nowness' (you'll be soooo happy if you get that new car, the latest pop CD, the very newest shampoo, deodorant or perfume, the very latest in clothing, and have sex, sex, sex at every opportunity—how can

you spare even a moment to think about 'the future of the culture' or some such troubling and difficult sort of thing, best left to impotent academics).

I think *Rollercoaster* is a great movie, but its pleasures and disturbances will be spoiled for you if you haven't seen the film before you read what follows. It is available (although not all stores bother to stock it: being a Canadian 'effort' and 'small', it received correspondingly small and effortful reviews) on both VHS and DVD in a really splendid widescreen transfer. For Torontonians: I found the video in Queen Video on Bloor St., and the DVD in my favourite store, Bay Street Video, where it can be purchased at a very reasonable price; the DVD includes a director commentary and a cast commentary).

A Note on Reviewers and Critics

The distinction I have implied between reviewers and critics perhaps requires brief clarification. It is by no means absolute: the critics of *CineAction*, for example, become reviewers each year when they write about films from the Toronto Festival. Basically, the distinction is simple: reviewers write for people who haven't seen the film, critics for people who have. This is why I almost never read reviews beyond the first few sentences: I like to see films knowing as little as possible about them, choosing what I go to on the work's credentials (especially director and subject matter, sometimes the actors) and on the recommendations of a few reviewers I respect (even if I don't read them very far). In the majority of cases the review-

er will have seen the film only once, and may have to write about it the day after viewing. The critic, on the other hand, will have lived with the film for months, perhaps years, perhaps decades, and will have seen it a number of times, during which period his/her view of it may have undergone drastic changes. I would hate to be a reviewer. The job is an easy one only when it concerns obviously very bad movies (e.g., most of what comes out of Hollywood these days). Faced with a work as complex as *Century Hotel*, for example, I would find it irresponsible to write about it after only one viewing, its intricate structure demanding very close attention over repeated viewings (no review I have read has even acknowledged that it is a difficult film). Even what one believes to be familiarity can mislead in cases of really demanding work: one instance of this is my analysis of *Flowers of Shanghai* in the last issue of *CineAction*, which I now know contains three factual errors. (If I have any excuse it is that I was working from an Asian DVD which seemed fine at the time but is in fact much too dark; recently, thanks to Cinematheque Ontario, I was able to see the film again on the big screen, with a far brighter image. No one watching the film in a theatre will believe that the man with Crimson in the last scene is Tony Leung). The reviewer recommends or warns. The critic likes to believe s/he is participating in a debate about the film with readers who are familiar with the object of criticism and will be in a position to agree or dispute (it is worth recalling once again the famous definition of the ideal critical debate by that greatest of critics F. R.



Leavis: the critic implies 'This is so, isn't it?' and receives the answer 'Yes, but...'). That is why I write almost exclusively about films that are available in some form. One might say that the development of video and DVD has made true film criticism possible. In an educated, cine-literate culture, a culture in which 'education' means more than 'career training' or the ability to make money, reviewers would become redundant. Prospective viewers would decide what they wanted to see from factual information, derived from the credits.

Rollercoaster

I missed *Rollercoaster* in the Toronto Festival (2000) but attended its theatrical opening on its first day. I was the only person in the auditorium. It ran, I believe, for one week. Since then I have watched the DVD five times, seeing more on each viewing, partly thanks to certain insights derived from the director and cast commentaries. The film is not in any obvious way 'difficult' but it is rich in significant detail (a gesture here, an expression there, a throwaway line of dialogue, a camera movement, a particular use of decor). I liked the film straight away, but I attribute my initial underestimation to precisely those preconceptions about Canadian cinema that I have attacked in reviewers: I suppose my attitude could have been summed up as 'very good for a small effort'. So I have not avoided contamination; consequently I missed things I should have picked up on from the start.

My renewed interest in the film developed out of my engagement with American high school comedies. While working on my article about them to appear in the next issue, and realizing their total refusal to confront certain crucial problems involving teenagers today (gayness, teen suicide, the frequent connection between the two), I thought suddenly of *Kitchen Party* and *Rollercoaster*, to both of which these issues are central. (One must now add *Ginger Snaps*, which had not then appeared, but which takes as its starting-point the projected joint suicide of two sisters. It seems to me inferior—less 'thought through'—than the two earlier films, but I have watched it only once). The Hollywood films belong, as a group, quite blatantly to that favourite and essential capitalist strategy of 'making us all think we're happy'; the Canadian films are oppositional and, whatever the filmmakers' conscious intentions, can stand as a critique of their jolly American relatives. The closest American equivalent is Larry Clark's *Kids*, to which *Rollercoaster* seems to me vastly superior on every level.

Structure

The film's intricate overall structure is built upon a set of interlocking structures:

a: The 24-hour time scheme. The film starts in early morning, ends in the next early morning. The effect is not mere symmetry: the 'next' morning is 'the morning after', when everything has changed, and where there are glimmers of fresh hope.

b: Weather. Shooting restrictions for this ultra-low-budget (but by no means 'small') film, shot entirely on location and outdoors, were extremely tight. That one scene—and one scene only—takes place in the rain, with all its connotations of

simultaneous sorrow and purification, was apparently (to judge from the commentaries) fortuitous. It just happens that it's the film's pivotal scene, to which everything leads up and from which everything follows

c. Progression i: The 'rides' in the amusement park (within or just outside which the entire film, up to the last shot, takes place). For the first third of the film everything is shut down, static, the kids climbing on a motionless rollercoaster; in the middle section (as things start moving dramatically) the machines are turned on; when night falls, the kids turn on all the lights, start all the 'rides', the park becomes a wonderland, a celebration of life (albeit a partially ironic one, in which suicide is still an option).

d. Progression ii: Dramatically, the film builds up to and then beyond two parallel crises (Chloe's, Stick's), the two linked by disclosure, the revelation of what was previously unspoken.

e. Paradox: the most likely of the characters to commit suicide is the one who emerges strengthened; the one who seems least likely is the one who goes through with it.

Source

Smith reveals in his commentary that the source of the film was a true story. Four teenagers decided to commit suicide together, as life appeared to hold nothing for them. But, when it came to the point, they found they'd run out of beer. So they drove off to a liquor store, came back, drank all the beer... and committed suicide. This story is told in the film by Stick, in one of its many extraordinary shots. He is standing (longshot) on the highest reach of the stationary rollercoaster, addressing his suicidal friends (with one of whom he is, potentially at least, in love). In the background is a mountain, with clouds around its peak, strongly suggesting the smoke from a latent, but about to erupt, volcano. I have been haunted by that image ever since I started watching the film seriously, by its fusion of visual beauty, precariousness, and imminent disaster. There are many beautiful moments in the film, marking it as the work of an artist with an instinctive understanding of cinema; if this one stands out it is because of its duration and the lack of movement, suggestive of a contemplative pause in the film's otherwise swift forward momentum.

Location and Cinematography

Having made the decision to shoot virtually the entire film within an out-of-season amusement park, Smith makes dazzlingly inventive use of its potential, both visual and dramatic. Nothing is faked, there are no back projections or studio sets, the camera is up there on the 'rides' with the kids, whether the rollercoaster and the other machines are static or in motion. The meagre reviews I read (polite, condescending) showed no sign of recognition of the nature or quality of Smith's achievement. The climactic sequences, where, at nightfall, the kids turn on all the fairground lights in a celebration of life that is partly real, partly (in the context of darkness and imminent death) ironic and valedictory, are at once exhilarating and painful. The use throughout of the various machines and other fairground decor is consistently intelligent, never merely

'colourful', always dramatically justified: the 'Zipper' in which Ben is tricked and trapped, the dodgems in which the characters' diverse tensions are released, the rollercoaster from which Darrin will throw himself, the hidden video 'eyes' that watch from various adornments.

Stick's progress

It is perhaps unfair to single out Brendan Fletcher's performance from a cast that contains no weaknesses, and under Smith's direction play faultlessly as an ensemble. (One gathers from the DVD's cast commentary, in which all six actors join, that Smith got them involved as a group before shooting started, and that they have remained friends ever since). But Fletcher has the showiest role and the character who undergoes the most development, and if anyone can be said to dominate the film it is he.

The subtleties with which Stick's progress is charted may not be apparent to the casual viewer, or perhaps to anyone on first viewing. Hollywood has habituated us to the careful spelling out of plot points, seldom allowing them to be made purely visually but underlining them in the dialogue. With Stick this is impossible: the gayness which he denies to himself as much as to the world can be 'spoken' only through inadvertent physical behaviour, and especially through his insistent physical contact with Darrin (Kett Turton), mainly a matter of those 'playful' punches that easily pass for 'normal' masculine behaviour among teenage boys. (Scott points out in his commentary how he tried as often as possible to connect Stick and Darrin in two-shots, one of which he describes as the 'lovers on the beach' shot). This inexplicitness serves an important function: the film becomes a cunning trap for homophobic teenagers in the audience, for whom Stick, throughout the film's first two-thirds, is the most obvious identification-figure, the most seemingly extrovert, the most active, the rowdiest. When the park attendant Ben (the film's only adult character) traps Stick in the washroom and sexually molests him, it is possible to read, carelessly, Stick's reactions merely as a sort of paralysed horror, Ben thereby becoming, at that point, the film's representative of homosexuality. The tables are then turned, the trap sprung, by Stick's subsequent revelation (the beginning of his self-acceptance).

If, however, we attend to the detail of Fletcher's remarkable performance, the stages of Stick's progress become clear: a. His constant 'playful' provocation, and constant awareness, of Darrin, never entirely rejected; b. The extremely complex reaction to Ben's molestation rendered by the actor's face, where horror mingles with desire (in the cast commentary the actors describe him as 'torn'); c. His pathetic attempt at self-denial in abruptly 'feeling up' Chloe, in whom he has shown not the least sign of sexual interest; d. His crucial speech to Justin (Darrin's younger brother), when Justin describes Ben as a 'fag' ('No. I'm a fag. He fucks kids'), in the scene Smith describes as the film's 'little window of hope'. e. His climactic revelation of his desire, in the game in which everyone has to lie, saying the opposite of the truth ('I hate you, Darrin. I fucking hate you'—Darrin understands perfectly and turns aside).

Does this contribute to Darrin's suicide? As with Stick,

Smith refuses to spell things out for us, but the context suggests the possibility, adding to the film's poignance and complexity. Its underlying assumption seems to be that these teenagers (including the barely teenage Justin) are at an age where sexuality has not been finally 'fixed', where there is still the possibility of flux. Darrin's fondness for Stick is evident throughout the film (to the point where one could almost substitute 'attraction to' for 'fondness for'). And Darrin has already had to face Chloe's revelations (which parallel Stick's): that she has been sexually promiscuous, that Darrin may not be the father of her child, and that in any case the child (the pretext for the joint suicide—Chloe's 'We're not going to bring our baby into this world') has already been aborted. The film's sensitivity to the confusions and fears of teenagers struggling to make sense of a harsh and hostile environment and of their places within it strikes me as a rare and valuable quality, totally lacking in the corresponding American teen comedies. (An aside: I find it intriguing that *Century Hotel* also culminates in a suicide pact in which the woman doesn't go through with it and the man does).

The film's delicacy and inexplicitness is summed up in the last scene, a single-take extreme long-shot. Outside the amusement park at last, the four survivors drive off. Then the car pulls up, and we see Justin get out and set off on his own, up a steep bank to the main highway. The car drives on, leaving the foreground empty, but then backs and stops again. Stick gets out and follows Justin. The boy (apparently about thirteen) has earlier shown a mature sensitivity toward Stick, responding to his 'It will be hard on you without Darrin' with 'It'll be hard on you'. Clearly, Stick has replaced Darrin as 'elder brother', and his following Justin is an acknowledgement of responsibility accepted; there is also the possibility that Justin may grow up gay, hinted at in his readiness to accept Stick. The 'little window of hope' (which refers to the possibility of supportive, positive human relations within a cruel and uncaring world) has opened a little further.

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Five viewings of this wonderful film have not been too many; I feel I have still not fully absorbed its nuances and its many pleasures. One wonders, with such an achievement so completely rejected in its own country, how long it will before Smith is able to make another film. An artist's development depends partly on his ability to keep working and producing, and this appears to be an acute problem in Canada, with its restricted and restrictive financing. Think how long it took after *Dirty* for Bruce Sweeney to make *Last Wedding*, or for Gary Burns after *Kitchen Party* to make *waydowntown*; or of how McGillivray, after *Life Classes* and *Understanding Bliss*, which together established him as a potentially major figure in world cinema, has been struggling to raise money for a new project. How long will David Weaver have to wait to fulfil his obvious potential, after the reviewers' casual and superior dismissal of *Century Hotel*? Canada will never develop a flourishing film culture while its most promising talents are denied the means of developing a career.

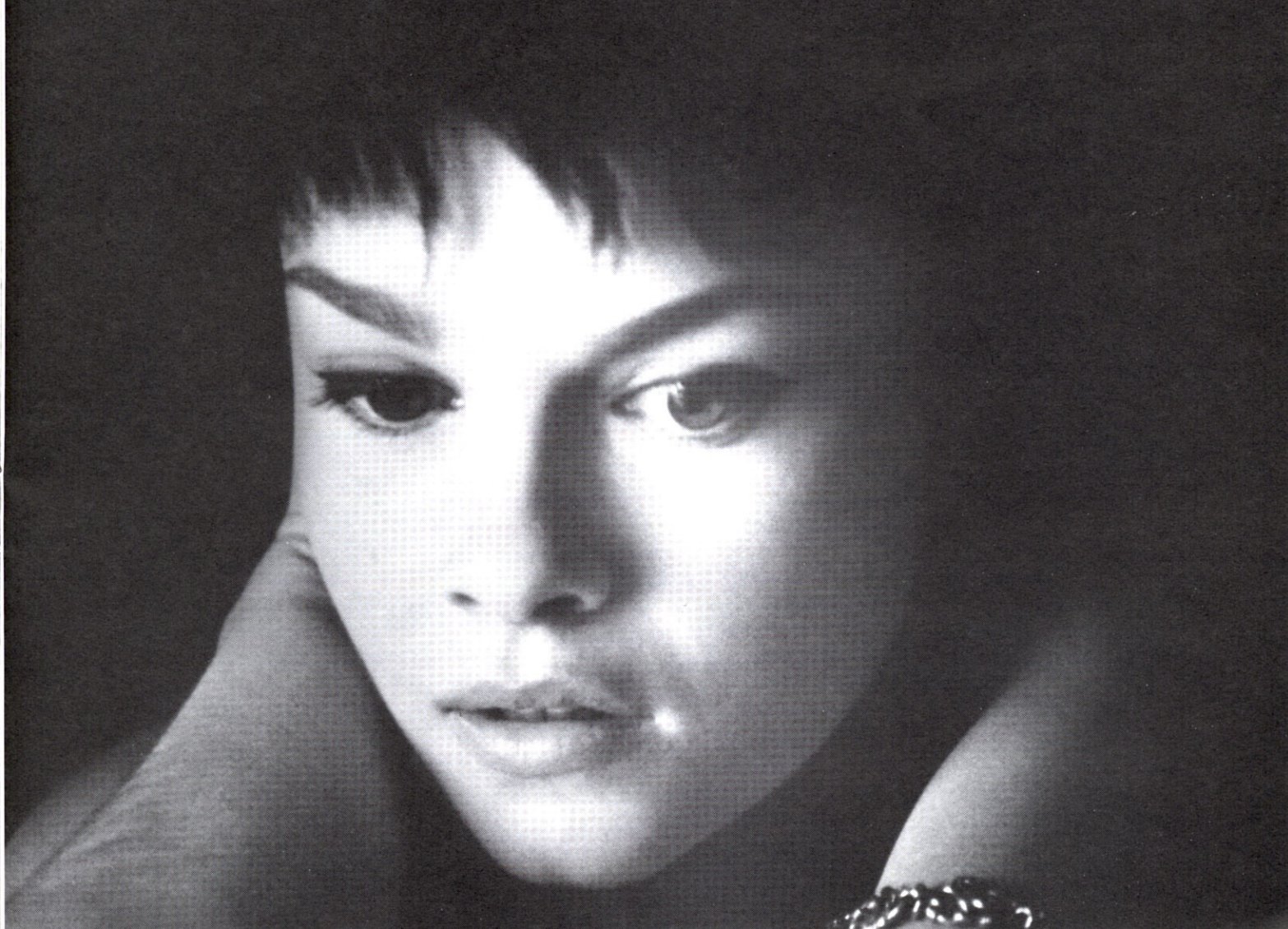
"IN THE SUN IT ALL LOOKS SO NICE"

A Note on Paul Almond's *Isabel*

by **Tony French**

I find it hard to write about *Isabel* (1968). That is in part because (as is of course not the case with, say, Hitchcock's or Bergman's work) I can't depend on its being known well, or at all, outside Canada: it isn't even listed by Maltin or Halliwell; it is a third of a century old; and it has dialogue that, for anyone who is not attuned to Canadian speech, is extremely elusive in places. It is difficult to write about partly, also, because it is such an intensely and elliptically cinematic work that its various components—plot, setting, cinematography, direction, cutting, use of sound both diegetic and extradiegetic and, last but by no means least, the absolutely extraordinary acting of Geneviève Bujold in the title-role—intertwine so inseparably that any written discussion is bound to seem insufferably clumsy, and a prose "exposition" is likely to leave the reader in as baffled a state as Isabel herself. But "find a copy and see it!" is hardly helpful criticism.

The story could not be simpler, at least on the surface. It is told in some 35 sequences averaging under 3 minutes each.



Isabel has been summoned home to her mother's funeral. In the couple of weeks that she spends in the village where she grew up, she comes to learn, mostly inadvertently, a good many horrifying truths about a family background that, back in 1968, must have seemed bizarre to the point of incredibility.

We first meet Isabel on the train, called home from Montreal, where she works, to her mother's funeral in the small fishing-village (apparently on the Péninsule de Gaspé in Quebec) where she grew up. I don't think it is hindsight on my part to say that, at once, before we know anything about the family or the village, we have a strong sense of unease and disorientation, despite the mundaneness of the railroad journey. Partly it comes from Bujold's tense expression and body language. Yes, she has lost her mother; but what else is the mat-

ter? In a series of very brief (almost jump-cut) images, we see and hear the following: the unnervingly loud train clattering through snowy woods speeding behind the girl's apprehensive profile; a male passenger glances embarrassingly at her too-short skirt (she is far from the big city now and getting further by the minute), the ticket-collector comes through, the guard announces the (French) names of the next stops, her paperback stays shut till she takes out the summoning telegram, a hamlet slides by, telegraph wires cross and recross, the pearly cold sea heaves beyond the spruces with snow still rushing behind her set features, she imagines her home—her mother's bedroom (presumably), a wave breaking on the village jetty, a menacing stare, that makes her cry out, from an old man who later turns out to be her Uncle Matt—the train bell tolls, she



shuts her eyes in dread. This opening sequence lasts for less than two minutes, so the reader can see why—even though I've had to some extent to subordinate its syntax to my own—I said at the beginning that the elliptical quality of *Isabel* was inseparable from its cinematic qualities. I think all I can now do is to summarise the narrative as it unfolds to Isabel's own consciousness, since, as with other stories of the gradual revelation of long-buried secrets—the Oedipus, for example, or *Ghosts*, much of the work's effect depends upon the gradual seeping-back of the past into the present as the appalled central character comes to realise that the nightmare s/he is living was always there and has underlain and infected the whole of life.

The railroad obviously doesn't reach as far as Isabel's fishing-village, whose isolation from "civilization" is repeatedly emphasized, so she is driven home in a truck through the bleak white landscape by a local man who remembers her as a little girl but who oddly drops her a hundred yards or so from the old-fashioned farmhouse and drives off without seeing her in. The women cleaning in preparation for the wake and funeral look up in unwelcoming (almost startled) surprise, as if they had seen a ghost, when Isabel carries her cases through the front door; and saying that her uncle Matt is unwell and lying down upstairs, they direct her to the parlour where her mother is laid out in an open coffin, her face the colour of lead. Again, we have a sense of something painfully wrong, over and above the recent death of a woman whose name, strangely and significantly enough, we are never to learn.

Next morning Isabel wakes up in her own bedroom which is on the first floor and has a ladder, through a door in the wall, leading to the attic where old junk is stored away out of sight. Along the landing she explores what had evidently been her mother's bedroom, with its medicines, crucifix and photos (at which Isabel looks broodingly) of men we take to be dead family-members; then goes along to her uncle who is still in bed, looking affable and quite unlike the threatening figure she had a brief vision of on the train. He has sent for her elder sister, the nun Estelle, who is arriving by train in time for the funeral. When Isabel meets her at the station—the two have not met for years, in fact Estelle seems to have left home when her sister was born twenty years before—Estelle turns out to be embittered, clenched in her own rectitude, crackling with hostility. (People's warmth in this community mostly matches the temperature, anyway to start with.)

During the preliminary gathering of the mourners, the funeral and the wake, we learn a good deal—mostly by picking up stray remarks—about the history of the Garnet family. The sisters' mother is to be buried next to her husband, Will, who was drowned years ago along with their brother, Arnold. So those are the photographs that Isabel was gazing at in her dead mother's bedroom!—together with another, as yet unexplained, of a man in old-fashioned uniform. But does the surviving brother (Uncle Matt) have some reason for bursting into tears at the funeral other than the loss of his housekeeping sister-in-law and the consequent problem, at his time of life, of wondering who will look after him in the future? Estelle has no doubt whose job it is: she says to her sister in French, as they

coldly part for her to go back to the convent, that in future it'll be Isabel's. But Isabel Garnet has a career to go back to in Montreal and is only taking a fortnight's compassionate leave—realising in any case, we guess, that someone absent for longer on even the best of grounds is liable to find herself out of work when she gets back.

It's the next day, or a day or two after, that odd things begin to happen in the old house. The dead mother, we and Isabel learn from Matt, always kept Arnold's bed made up just in case... A spilt pail of oats in the barn when Isabel goes there to feed the horses suddenly seems (to her at least) to be full of menacing significance, especially when it is at once followed by the prize bay stallion's attempt to pin her in his stall, as the wind howls, heralding a spring storm of just the kind, says Uncle Matt that evening, in which Will and Arnold were drowned. When he is upstairs briefly Isabel is terrified to hear a knock and see a figure in oilskins through the blurred glass of the back door (19'—times henceforward given to the nearest minute). Matt, returning with a jewellery box, tries to laugh her out of her fears and reassuringly shows her trinkets—a locket, a mouth-organ—belonging to her dead mother and brother.

Here we come up against a real problem in the film: how many of Isabel's experiences are "objective" (i.e. we would have experienced them too had we been where she was), and how many are fantasy—delusion—hysteria? How do we know, anyway? In Bergman's *Såsom i en Spegel* (*Through a Glass Darkly*) we can, as it were, triangulate Karin's experiences and their status by taking into account those of the other three characters in the story: the father, husband, the brother... though the first two at any rate come to seem, if anything, only too crassly sane in the context of Karin's hypersensitivity, to a point where, for me, her schizophrenia starts to seem normal and their "normality" a refusal to face the kind of world they live in and have partly created. Be that as it may, in Isabel we are not—or not yet (we are only twenty minutes into the film)—sure where we stand. At this point there seems to be no clear way of making up our minds. I think there eventually is, but we don't find out till very much later (which is not to say that there is some slick, trick reversal/revelation as in *Les Diaboliques*, of which *The Sting* was a howling burlesque). So we just have to be patient—which, given the quality of Bujold's performance, is not difficult, since we constantly feel even her oddest experiences as if they were really happening to us: and that is the mark of an actor so talented that even the most skilful of directors could not hope to draw such a performance from her if the basic gift weren't there to start with.

Spring comes, ice drips rushingly, flocs break up, perhaps (it is not yet clear) suggesting that the disturbingly cold relations among the characters will thaw too. While Isabel is at the Post Office, asking in vain for a letter from Montreal—there are no mail deliveries here, any more than the family home has a 'phone or electricity—she hears some curious tales about her grandfather Cedric, who brought a "rig" back from the First World War and thought the "Huns" were attacking his mill and "died defending it once too often," according to the elderly post-master. The fifty-year-old "rig," when Isabel unearths it in the attic at home, turns out to be a helmet, a water bottle,

and a gas mask which has a disturbingly interrogative stare. We hear the whistle of a shell. Curious, edgy, Isabel asks her uncle how her grandfather died and why he isn't buried in consecrated ground. "Accident down at the mill about the time your mother was carrying Estelle," he curtly answers, "there was never any question of his taking his own life, no question at all..." and then adds, half-withdrawing his previous words, "what the war does to a man, eh?"

Isabel finds that the sawmill has fallen into ruin, when she goes to explore it; another shell-shriek mingles with the splash of the millrace. From those restless waters she bikes to the jetty where, as she is buying herring for her uncle's supper, a stranger climbs up from below and is identified by the fisherman as Jason, a newly-arrived stranger with plenty of money which, it emerges, he wants to use to buy the old Garnet farm. Isabel looks at him baffled—evidently he reminds her of someone but she can't think who, a response made explicit by her uncle when he meets him: "you're the spitting image of someone I knew" (27). Perhaps we, if we've been looking attentively at the photos on the walls, are not quite so puzzled: all three dead Garnets—Cedric, Will and Arnold—have a strong family resemblance... and so does Jason. He might almost be a revenant, a possibility he seems to recognise himself when, in the next sequence (35), she asks him "How come I've never seen you before?" and he answers, "Haven't you?" Isabel's life, as we shall see, is full of such "ghosts," right up to the shocking final shot. His effect on Isabel is powerfully erotic: as she turns in that night—having kissed her uncle goodnight for the first time since she got back, and again scrutinising the family pictures on the stairs—she undresses (31) and almost, so to say, seeing herself for the first time, looks at herself naked in her mirror, with the door to the attic ajar, as if someone were spying on her with her connivance and to her pleasure. She drifts off to sleep half-naked, caressing the sheets, visualising Jason on the jetty. It is an extraordinary moment, uncontaminated, I think, by any sense of voyeurism on our part, though—even the first time round, perhaps—shot through with our sense that her wished fulfilment is going in some unspecifiable way to be a betrayal.

Jason continues his negotiations to buy the old farm, as Matt regretfully tells him which bits of it are good for which crops. What is to become of Matt himself remains unclear, but Isabel is obviously unwilling and unable to stay and look after him, Estelle's religious Order doesn't apparently care for ageing people, and he hates the thought of leaving the family acres. Matt, glancing across the property (36), casually tells Jason and Isabel that "little Jacob"—seemingly Cedric (the grandfather's) son—was killed over yonder by a boar, thus adding another puzzle to the increasingly odd history of this family. Who was Jacob's mother? we wonder; and why would a pig kill him? Of the eight family-members we know about up to this point, one (the Mother) has just died a natural death and four others violent or dubious ones.

Isabel is to leave soon—"on Sunday," she tells the truck driver taking her to the Post Office through another spring storm. This time there is a letter—but from her boss in Montreal, giving her the sack. Another letter, from her much missed Louise,

the girl she apparently lives with (in one sense or another), sounds cold and distant, though Isabel protests that she is eager to go on paying half the rent of their apartment, as she always has. Replying later to Louise, she casts her eyes over the family home and makes explicit the sense we have already acquired—that it is ill-omened: "In the sun it all looks so nice, but most of the time it seems like the place is. . . ." Her ellipsis could not be more eloquent.

Isabel (43) goes to the General Store (one of the two village shops we see) to buy some molasses, and to 'phone for electricity to be connected to the farm for Jason, the new owner. There are some local lads sitting around, "Herb" being the ring-leader, and they start coming on to her and also dropping hints about the Garnet family history and house. They mention "the crazy one" (Cedric?) and "pigs" (Jacob's mysterious death, presumably), as well as a haunting "light" that has been seen going round the house. Herb invites Isabel to the pictures; she responds with contempt. When she gets home she invites Jason, feeding the pigs (one pair copulating), to supper. He inexplicably refuses. Then, looking out of the kitchen window, she sees a distant fence-post replaced by something that looks like The Grim Reaper. She shuts her eyes; looks again; it is just a fence-post.

That evening on the verandah (48) there is another half-promise of harmony—a get-together of Isabel and her uncle, the faithful truck-driver with his wife Viola, and Jason, playing the guitar and singing old ballads. Yet even here, despite Isabel and Jason exchanging deeply desirous looks, we learn that Arnold was starting the guitar "the year he died," that all the young people are leaving the village, that Matt misses his dead sister-in-law "terrible," and that Jacob's head was too big—perhaps because Cedric, having been through The War, wasn't "too well" when he fathered him. Jacob was a "real menace," says Viola, he would wring a chicken's neck and chew it; the pig got him (51). Sent down to the cellar to bring up some cider "your mother put down last Fall," Isabel finds an empty barrel, hears a ghostly passing-bell, is terrified. Later she walks along the shore and, again mentally composing a letter to Louise, cries to herself, "nothing works any more. . . ."

Nor does it. When, that night, she goes to the Post Office (55) and, this time driven by the loutish Herb, finally picks up a letter from her girl-friend in Montreal, she finds she "can't trust anyone." It seems that Louise, having taken up (in some sense) with another girl who, perhaps unlike Isabel, is "very neat," will now only promise that she'll hang on to Isabel's clothes till she picks them up when she gets back. The promise to help her find another job has been forgotten: so, as Herb predatorily realises (along with us), Isabel is now without a job or anywhere to live.

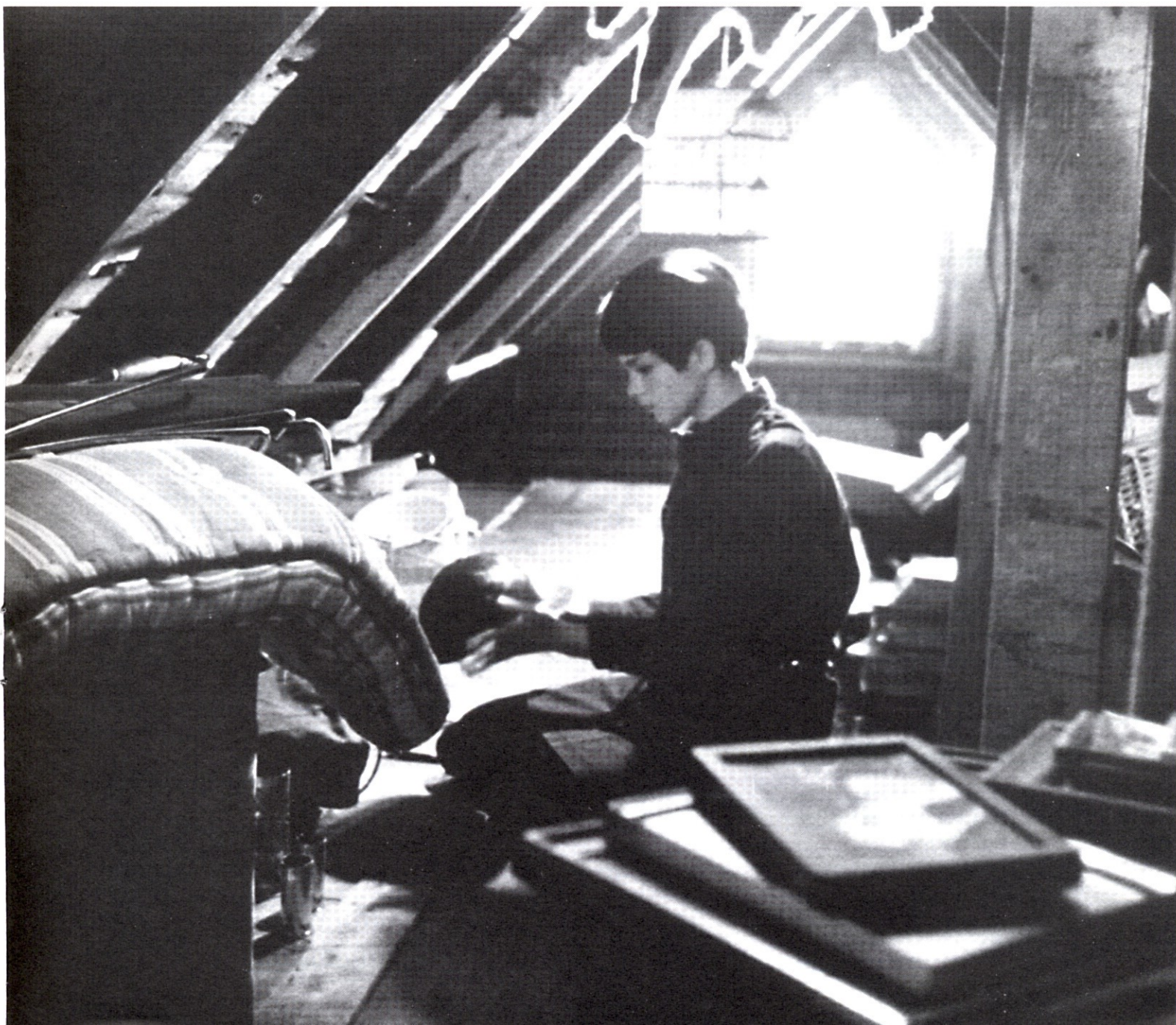
It is when she is in this peculiarly vulnerable state, and after several drinks with Herb, who however unattractive at least lends her an ostensibly sympathetic ear, that she learns from him just why he and the other town louts think she's such an easy target. Provoked by her humiliating refusal to go dancing with him "on Friday," he tells her what we can only presume is the common village gossip about her family—gossip about which we have been getting hints and nudges during the

whole preceding hour, although nothing has really prepared us for the full horror—remember, this is 1968 and is not taking place in a liberated Big City—of what he is going to say.

Refusing to go dancing with him, Isabel has cited the harsh upbringing she had in accordance with her mother's strict principles. Herb jeers. Cedric, her grandfather (presumably having fathered Will and Matt from a first wife, though this is not clear) "found her"—the never-named Mother; brought her home as a "maid" (57); and made her his mistress till he went away to fight in The Great War. As he was abroad for five years, The Mother consoled herself—for she was only human, aren't we all? (Herb asks, leering)—with Cedric's son Will. Once back, Cedric, after fathering Jacob (the retarded chicken-killing boy who was chewed up by a boar), died under mysterious circum-

stances: probably a shell-shocked crazy suicide. Will then married The Mother, who was already three months pregnant with Estelle. Isabel and Arnold followed later. Then, when Will was drowned along with his son Arnold, The Mother took up with Matt, Isabel's uncle, whom till her recent death she had been caring for, and living with, for many years. It is clear that the family's past is shrouded in incest as well as adultery.

The fact that this gossip comes from the despicable Herb doesn't invalidate its probative weight at all, because like Isabel—and with equal horror—we suddenly realise that it makes sense of much of the otherwise inexplicable unease we've been feeling all along, as well as (at a much more mundane level) making all sorts of remarks by the village folk fall into place as incidents in a story they dared not tell the inno-



cent—I have to say, the consciously innocent—Isabel.

Isabel's immediate reaction to Herb's revelations is to get tipsy. Singing, with hysterical undertones, she lets him drive her home in his truck (59), oblivious —yet perhaps not really oblivious—of the risk she's running, pushing him away when he comes on. Turning in, she lights her oil-lamp to light her to bed, brushes her teeth matter-of-factly, ignores her bedroom's open door to the attic and then, when her light goes out suddenly and she sees (or thinks she sees) Uncle Matt on the attic stair, in the same posture and with the same menacing expression he had when she saw him in that strange flash on the train in the opening sequence. She screams, "Nothing is all right! Nothing is all right at all!" It is a moment of wrenching panic for us also, for her consciousness has carried us along with it to such an extent that we too feel ourselves unravelling as, after Herb's revelations, all the mendacious fortifications she has protectively built around herself to go on functioning at all are starting to crumble away, and seemingly unconnected moments of earlier panic are starting to form a pattern the more terrifying because its true shape and content are not visible yet. Next morning (61) the genial daylight Uncle Matt is driven off to have a daylong series of eye-tests at the nearest hospital, in Campbellton (near Dalhousie on Chaleur Bay). He won't be back till late the next day, so Isabel is left nervously alone at the farm, her state at once unbearably intensified by her coming across a hen that has had its head torn off—a practice we recall that the "real menace" Jacob used to engage in (cf. 51) before he was ripped up by the boar. To Isabel's heightened nerves, the interior of the house, though flooded with daylight, looks indescribably threatening, with its ticking clock chiming like doom (a leitmotif throughout, but one I haven't got the space to detail: Almond's use of sound is brilliant everywhere), its meaningless household chores, Arnold's forever empty bedroom... Isabel understandably jumps on her bike and flees for a few hours, but things are no better when she gets back at lunchtime, and she can't even still her audibly beating heart enough to go down into the cellar and get an apple... the afternoon drags on, the photos of the dead scrutinise her, dusk begins to fall, and when she finally does pluck up the courage to go down below she hears sinister creaks up above, from the room she has just quitted.

But it's only Viola (the neighbour on the verandah who told the zoophobic Jacob's story), come to invite Isabel to spend the night at her place. And naturally Isabel can't get away fast enough, through the windy twilight.

There follows a dream sequence, but auditory rather than visual. We and Isabel hear apparently disconnected scraps of speech from her childhood and school-days. Most of them, in another context, would sound innocent enough; but in her (and our) state of heightened expectation of a nemesis that is emerging from past horrors, some sound ominous in their possible sexual overtones—"come down with your uncle Matthew and get some molasses... prettiest lips in the convent... don't get molasses on that nice uniform...." And again (as at 34) there is an image of Jason on the jetty, connecting Isabel's present sexuality with the distorted whispers of childish history we have just been overhearing.

Over breakfast at Viola's, her son reveals that "the light" (cf. Herb at 43) has been seen in the empty Garnet house the previous night. Someone asks, do the dead come back? Rubbish, says Viola's mother. And indeed when Isabel goes home and braces herself to go in, everything (including the watchful photographs) looks much as usual, except that the clock has stopped at half past four that morning. Jason, stopping by, pooh-poohs Isabel's fears: most likely the hen had its head torn off by a marauding fox, the clock just needs winding, and so on. He invites her to go trout-fishing with him, so she goes up to the attic to find a rod, which she disinters from near Cedric's vigilant gas mask. The clock is ticking and showing the right time, though, when she gets downstairs again (79), and Jason is nowhere to be seen, not even when she calls out to him. She sees something (we don't know what) in the corner and hurls the rod at it, screaming "Get out of my life!" Jason hurries in from digging worms for bait, calms her, clears up the mess, and asks her to make some sandwiches for their expedition. And of course we can't help wondering whether poor Isabel isn't entering an acute phase, perhaps of schizophrenia, in which everything she sees is simply going to be subordinated to her overmastering delusional system, although there does seem "objectively" to be enough that the village folk feel is queer about the family, its history and its house, for us to be confident that Isabel is not merely rearranging (or creating) reality and being sucked down into the maelstrom of madness like Karin in the Bergman film I've already mentioned.

Her fishing expedition with the mysterious Jason (80) brings some moments of joy when, after they have passed by the ruined mill and reached a broader part of the river, he slips into a pool and gets wet. He invites her to go to the dance on Friday, and she repeats what she told Herb (56)—that her mother was too strict to let her go to dances when she was younger. They laugh and eat, as he reveals that he knew her (by sight, at least) when she was a little girl: he used to lie in wait for her and her uncle, just to see her in her convent uniform, up on yonder trail. She oddly wonders if they may somehow be related—which, given his resemblance to the family photographs and the smallness of the community, seems not impossible. But he laughs the idea off ("Me, a Garnet?!"), revealing that when, during this visit of hers, he found out she was leaving in a fortnight (presumably back at 36), it was "the worst time of my life." This roundabout declaration of love makes Isabel, already stressed to her limits by what has happened and been revealed since her mother died, burst into inconsolable tears.

Friday night comes, and with it the barn-dance (86) which, with its aftermath, will form the closing movement and puzzling climax of the film.

For the first time we see Isabel utterly carefree and glowing with joy in the midst of her tiny community as she dances round with Jason, despite the woodenly resigned face of the old fiddler who is setting the tempo (no touch in this film is unconsidered). Isabel is pleasantly exhausted at the end, sits down too out of breath to dance yet with another young man, but then, looking round for Jason, finds he is nowhere to be seen (as when she came down from the attic at 79)—he almost manages to vanish, to dematerialise, from time to time, maybe

boosting our sense that he is not altogether real,—that he is a much-desired fantasy of Isabel's, even though, as a prospective purchaser of the Garnet farm and a physical presence to Uncle Matt and the neighbours as well as to Isabel, he seems solid enough. But by this stage of the film our sense of the difference between what is “real” and what isn't has been rather thoroughly eroded, and we may have the feeling in the barn-dance that we, like Isabel, are assisting at some ghostly reunion where past and present intermingle... as, we reflect, they “really” do in our everyday lives.

Isabel is as anxious about Jason's disappearance as she was before their fishing-trip, and goes outside to look for him, encountering several young bucks who are rather tipsy and eventually running into Herb and a couple of his cronies, who are really drunk and claim with (to us) obvious insincerity that they've seen Jason going into the barn with some big fellows who looked as though they were going to beat him up, so why don't they come with her and help rescue him? Of course they have only one thing in mind, and as soon as they get her into the dim interior (Jason being nowhere about) they start trying to pack-rape her. But then he suddenly appears (from where?), takes them on among the milling cows, and after a desperate struggle chases them off (94). The pair comfort each other, Isabel helps him to clean himself up, weeps, laughs hysterically.

As we next see the couple (for we think of them as a couple by this stage) walking calmly along the road back to Isabel's house, we feel the story can now have only one kind of closure—an obvious bourgeois/romantic end, of a kind common in films even today, and pretty well standard thirty-three years ago. The director plays skilfully on our half-conscious assumption that Isabel will marry Jason—has he not just rescued her from a fate worse than death?—and settle down in her native village. After all, she has neither a job nor even a place to lay her head in Montreal; patently, the most sensible thing for her to do is to stay on at her family farm as the attractive young man's wife, looking after her uncle Matt in his declining years while starting to raise a family of her own who will, in the fullness of time, inherit the ancestral property and keep it in the Garnet line if not in the Garnet name.

The chaste goodnight kiss they exchange (96) when he has walked her to her door reinforces our expectations. He has to go out fishing, she is tired out and wants to go to bed. As she gets inside, she looks back and (as at 19, before she met Jason at all) sees his (his?) ghostly figure through the blurred glass of the door. But this time her fleeting expressions do not include terror. Yet as she goes to bed, she oddly whispers not “Jason” but “Matt”; then, hearing the clock tolling from downstairs and an unidentifiable moaning, she goes back down, to find her Uncle Matt weeping on the sofa in the parlour. As past and present begin melting down into each other (for us as well as for her), she calls Matt “father.” When he says “I loved her”—meaning Isabel's innominate mother, we dazedly presume—she slaps his face again and again, screaming “Leave me alone!” (reminding us of her previous outbursts, “Nothing is all right at all!” and “Get out of my life!” [61, 79]).

As it dawns upon us, and perhaps on her too, that both her mother and she have been used—even sexually abused—by

men who were either brutal, weak or in the case of Cedric damaged beyond repair (or all of the above), she jumps on her bike and pedals furiously to the jetty where Jason is presumably getting ready to cast off.

Of course the action doesn't have nearly as sedate a narrative effect on us as my prose will probably have suggested; I blush for the utter inadequacy of my medium. And it is even less adequate to the extraordinary sequence of shots which make up the conclusion—if anything so unlike a recognisable end can be called that. Isabel has ridden to Jason; he climbs from his boat onto the jetty but she flees through the rising storm. He catches up with her (100), she holds him half-fainting, falling, we hear rather than see him ripping off her clothes... but then in horror we see what appears to be the corpse of Cedric—anyway, it is a dead soldier in First World War uniform—lying on the—well, lying somewhere, wherever “where” now is, and Isabel kisses it/him. As Jason bends over her to kiss her, his face metamorphoses into Arnold's, into Uncle Matt's,—and the appalled realisation dawns on her and us that “Uncle” Matt is (as she half-realised a few moments before) quite possibly not her uncle but her father. Her ruined past has burst through into her present and, worse, into her future; indeed, she can have no future, because all men—even a man as young, attractive and apparently unconnected with her or her family as Jason—will melt into, become, be, the same abusive man. She may well (she doesn't “know” this but clearly feels it) spend the rest of her life being passed from man to man, repeating her mother's history till the end of her days. She has not merely lost her city identity (the girl-friend, her career, the apartment), she now finds that her old village-identity is hopelessly polluted by long-past events she had repressed and whose “return” has shattered the thin shell of any identity at all.

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It would be easy enough to finish this essay by pointing out that in 1968 the notion of Recovered Memory was virtually unknown, and that not till the feminist-Freudian initiatives of the late 1970s and early '80s—Judith Lewis Herman's book (*Father-Daughter Incest*, Harvard University Press, 1981) being the trail-blazer here—did the possibility of manipulative, even incestuous, relationships within the “normal” family (especially father [or uncle]/daughter ones) begin to be generally recognised. And it would be easy enough to congratulate Paul Almond on merely having, though with remarkable prescience, anticipated this growing understanding of family potentialities by a good dozen years. Nor does one want to minimise this achievement, even while uneasily feeling that one might just as well congratulate Sophocles and Shakespeare on having had the foresight to anticipate Ernest Jones's Hamlet and Oedipus. In fact, of course, the achievement of Almond—and inseparably of the incomparable Bujold—is a great deal more than simply clinical, for if we really take what the film offers, we are ourselves forced, whatever comforting illusions we may have started out with, to suffer something of what Isabel suffers, and to brood disconsolately over the appalling relations between power and love.

P E R S I S T E N C E O F

The Wonderful World of John Paizs

by Robert L. Cagle

John Paizs is Canadian cinema's forgotten child. Although his early films virtually established the postmodern style of the Winnipeg Film Group,¹ and his first feature, *Crime Wave* (1985), was named Best Film Made in Manitoba,² Paizs and his films remain little more than marginal notes in the history of Canadian cinema. For example, when Toronto-based *Take One* magazine asked critics and scholars to name the ten best Canadian films of all time, only four of the ninety-six published responses included Paizs's work.³ Paizs is absent from both of the special issues of *Post Script* dedicated to Canadian Cinema, as well as from past Canadian cinema-themed issues of *cineAction*.⁴ His works are not discussed in Christopher Gittings's *Canadian National Cinema*.⁵ And in Pierre Véronneau's study of English-Canadian cinema, *À la recherche d'une identité*, Paizs (whose name is misspelled as "Paisz") is mentioned only in passing and is omitted entirely from the "Bio-filmographies" section.⁶

Of the few critics who have recognized Paizs as one of Canada's greatest untapped resources, nearly all have focused on the post-modern qualities of his films. Geoff Pevere, who has written what is unquestionably the most insightful commentary on Paizs's *oeuvre*, sees these films as illustrations of the logical extension of what



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Robert Fothergill has termed "the younger brother syndrome,"⁷ a cinematic disorder that afflicts the protagonists of Canadian feature films—an inferiority complex "caused by the intimidating, pervasive, and ultimately emasculating presence of that great, perfect, and powerful sibling to the south..."⁸

In his "Prairie Postmodern: An introduction to the mind & films of John Paizs," Pevere maps out how Paizs's manipulation of pop culture iconography becomes a critique of America's cultural colonialism of Canada: "Paizs is both a regurgitator and an ironic commentator on the phenomenon of subconscious infiltration by an alien ideology that has functionally made cultural schizophrenics of a generation of TV-toasted Anglo-Canadians who shovel their snowy driveways while yearning for the blue beam of boxed oblivion."¹² In Paizs's appropriation of signs and styles from American pop culture, Pevere finds the definitive depiction of growing up Canadian in the 1960s and 70s.⁹ What distinguishes Paizs's work from other similar projects is that while so-called "nostalgia" films tell stories of another era using the methods and styles of the time period in which they are made, Paizs's films appropriate the outmoded conventions of 1960s film and television to tell stories that are timeless. "The result is a veritable semiological catalogue-in-action of the sign-systems of '60s pop media. The striking intelligence and singularity of the films is thus in the revelatory way they reveal these sign-systems as sign-systems....Paizs effectively demonstrates—in practice—the Barthesian dictum that forms of cultural mythology only become apparent and artificial once enough time has elapsed to allow them to fall out of practical usage and be replaced by others."¹²

Paizs's films have the power to fascinate viewers who, like the filmmaker, grew up in the TV age and found themselves simultaneously seduced and abandoned by the televisual dream screen. His intriguing character studies exhibit a constantly fluctuating love/hate relationship with the idealized images that have organized both the director's fantasy life and those of his like-minded viewers. These films mix equal parts cool irony and warm nostalgia to illustrate in unmistakable terms the kind of dual subjectivity that is a defining feature of the camp response.

Although camp has long been viewed as a sensibility that is inextricably linked to a gay sensibility,¹⁰ Paizs's work illustrates that camp as a resistant artistic practice can be appropriated and used by other, similarly oppressed groups. The relevance of camp for Canadian artists rests in the fact that, as is the case with gay men, Canadians are marginalized, and often depicted as an "other" in dominant American cultural iconography. Likewise, as with gay men, Canadians are often the target of tendentious jokes in which they are presented as irrefutably and immutably "alien." The view of Canada taken by American corporations, too—especially those related to the entertainment industry—as a vast natural resource just waiting

to be exploited (in every sense of the word)¹¹ clearly parallels the post-Stonewall-era view of gay men as a new target audience for high-end consumer goods—an ideal group (because of the common, if incorrect, belief that all gay men are upper-middle class) for commercial exploitation.¹² Finally, the most intriguing link between these two groups is the relative invisibility of their difference from North America's supposedly dominant culture: white, heterosexual, and American. Like gay men who are mistaken for straight, Canadians are often mistaken for Americans. The (incorrect) assumption, in either case is that the "other," by failing to announce his/her identity, is somehow concealing aspects of his/her personality, and is thus "passing."

Canadian humorist Scott Thompson (as the inimitable Buddy Cole) tackles this subject with typical aplomb: Seated on a bar stool with a cocktail in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Cole speaks of a trip abroad on which his fellow travellers mistakenly assume that he is an American. Cole responds with disdain, hissing: "I'm as offended when people mistake me for being American as when they mistake me for straight!" Thompson illustrates the underlying resentment against dominant culture that unites marginalized and oppressed groups. In other words, the experience of the Canadian is, as

1 "In Paizs' wake, the films of people like M.B. Duggan, Allen Schinkel, Tracey Traeger, John Kozak, Steve Hegyi, Lorne Bailey, and, of course, Guy Maddin made it possible to detect and identify something like a Winnipeg style." Geoff Pevere, "Greenland Revisited: The Winnipeg Film Group During the 1980s," in *Dislocations* (Winnipeg: City Press, Ltd., 1995) 40.

2 Randall King, "Paizs' Days: After 14 Years, Local Director Back on Top at Toronto Film Fest," *Winnipeg Sun* 14 Sep 1999. King makes reference to "...an acknowledgement in 1997 from the Manitoba film industry that [Crime Wave] was the best film made in Manitoba, period."

3 Piers Handling, "Canada's Ten Best," *Take One* Fall 1994, 22-30.

4 *Post Script*, 15:01 (Fall 1995) "Canadian Cinema," and 18:02 (Winter/Spring 1999), "Canadian Cinema II." *cineAction* 16, "Canadian Cinema," 28, "Canada: Cinema and Criticism"; and 45, "Canadian Cinemas/Festivals."

5 Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

6 Pierre Véronneau, *À la recherche d'une identité: Renaissance du cinéma d'auteur canadien-anglais*, Montreal: Cinéma-thèque Québécoise, 1991.

7 Robert Fothergill, "Coward, Bully, or Clown: The Dream-life of a Younger Brother," in *The Canadian Film Reader*, Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson, eds. (Toronto: P. Martin, 1977), 234-250.

8 Geoff Pevere, "Prairie Postmodern: An Introduction to the Mind and Films of John Paizs," *Cinema Canada* April 1985, 11-13.

9 "He speaks to that vast generation of culturally polluted schizophrenic Canadians who grew up with their feet in the slush and their eyes on Beverly Hills." (Pevere, 13)

10 See, for example Jack Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," in *Gays and Film*, Richard Dyer, ed., (London: BFI, 1977), 40-57. It is only recently that critics have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to reclaim the camp sensibility for other groups. For examples of this type of work, see David Bergman, ed., *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993) and Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

11 See, for example Joyce Nelson, *Sign Crimes/Road Kill* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992); Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State, 1990); and David Flaherty and Frank Manning, *The Beaver Bites Back: American Popular Culture in Canada* (Montreal: McGill/Queen's, 1994).

12 Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982).

13 Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1969), 277-293.

Thompson's skit suggests, not that different from that of the gay man. Thompson's performance as the delightfully mannered barfly Cole injects a note of humour in its purposeful adoption of behavioural stereotypes. Rather than disputing the devalued view of gay men as walking, talking stereotypes, Thompson-as-Cole reclaims it and mirrors it back with a vengeance, but in such a way that highlights the artificiality of this image. To a world that views him as little more than a collection of affectations, he gives back affectations.

In her seminal essay on the subject Susan Sontag¹³ identifies this fascination with artifice as one of the salient features of the camp sensibility. "Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism," Sontag writes. "It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. "(279) Camp, then, is a way of looking at the world as a collection of surfaces and depths that do not necessarily fit together, driven by the pleasure of recognizing incongruity and artificiality. "It's not a lamp, but a 'lamp';" writes Sontag, "not a woman, but a 'woman.'" To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre."(281)

Jack Babuscio expands on this premise, defining camp as "a relationship between activities, individuals, situations, and gayness." (45) For Babuscio, camp is a means of perceiving life from the perspective of an outsider—a practice that lends the subject "a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression."(44) Babuscio sees camp as a by-product of passing for straight—"a phenomenon generally defined in the metaphor of theater, that is, playing a role: pretending to be something that one is not."(45) It is, Babuscio argues, this experience of passing that is at the base of the overwhelming popularity of performers such as Jayne Mansfield, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, and Tallulah Bankhead, actresses whose outrageously exaggerated role-playing parody the supposed performance of heterosexuality associated with passing, and, like Thompson's performance mentioned above, highlight the artificiality of behavioural codes.

These codes most generally become visible at the intersection of two incongruous terms. The contrasts between youth and old age, beauty and ugliness, for example, are common themes in camp films. Babuscio cites Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* (1962) as a prime examples. But while, on the surface, the laughter associated with these visions of difference—of aging women trying desperately to retain (or regain) their lost youth and beauty—might seem cruel, it covers over another, more sympathetic response. As Babuscio explains, "[the incongruity] must in addition to being comic, affect one as 'painful'—though not so painful as to neutralize the humor"(49)

Critic Andrew Ross¹⁴ associates the camp meaning of such representations not merely with the incongruities depicted in them, but also the cultural and technological shifts underlying these incongruities. Thus, the excesses of *Sunset Boulevard*'s silent movie star Norma Desmond are a product of the film's juxtaposing of "the technological environment of the present

with the traumatic passing of silent film." (138) In *Baby Jane*, the focus shifts from the outdated modes of production to forgotten products. "The camp effect, then, is created not simply by a change in the mode of cultural production, but rather when the products (stars, in this case) of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste." (139) In other words, these films are a kind of recycled art—living testaments to a formerly dominant system that has, with the passing of time, fallen out of favor. The transformation of these works from mere films into camp objects occurs when the spectator recognizes the reality at work behind these outmoded systems and products. It is, thus, impossible to comprehend the camp meaning of *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane* without acknowledging that the plight of the Hudson sisters is effected through the exploitation of the similar situations in which the film's stars, two faded icons of Hollywood royalty, found themselves at the dawn of the age of television. The camp response, then, is based upon the simultaneous recognition of the manifest content of the narrative, the unspoken subtext of the work, and most important of all, the relation between these two projects.

Scott Long,¹⁵ focuses on this unique ability to see/read simultaneously from multiple perspectives in his analysis of "straight" and "camp" spectatorship. According to Long, the straight viewer "seeks catharsis: the satisfactory resolution of the films' conflicts in a frame that allows both emotional involvement and intellectual acceptance of the viewer's part....Yet it runs afoul of the fact that the narrative content of the films clearly romanticizes men's manipulation of women, a process in which even the films' technique seems to participate." (87) The camp viewer, on the other hand, "enjoys its distance: by definition it refuses to identify with the films except in mocking fashion. It searches not for unity, but for disparities....It senses the disparity between event and treatment and it laughs"(87)

In both form and content, John Paizs's films represent the cinematic application of this sensibility. The director's highly visible penchant for recycling outmoded representational conventions lends his films textual and textural complexities that exemplify the camp response. In *The Obsession of Billy Botski* (1980), for example, the director borrows a familiar—indeed clichéd—plot (a loner searches for love) from a shared cultural past and transforms it into a highly ironic commentary on romance and the movies. The film's laconic protagonist Billy (Paizs), is first introduced climbing the stairs to his suite in the attic of his uncle's house. Scattered on the landings are women's undergarments, which Billy picks up as he goes. Once in the apartment, Billy loosens his tie, mixes two smart cocktails, turns on some music, and steps into his darkened bedroom, where he begins to undress. Shirtless, Billy reclines on his bed as a hand with bright red fingernails moves out of the shadows and across Billy's abdomen; the hand unfastens the button of Billy's trousers and then unzips his fly. The encounter comes to a sudden halt when the telephone rings. Off goes the record, with the sound of the music slowing to a halt providing the perfect aural equivalent to Billy's wilting

erection. Billy picks the phone and a man's voice stammers: He has reached a wrong number. Before the caller has a chance to apologize, Billy hangs up the phone, revealing in the process that the hand with the red fingernails was, in fact, his own.

Billy then relates, in voice-over narration, the history of his private and enduring obsession with the "Connies" of 1960s pop culture. A montage of images from the magazines and album covers that fill Billy's home follows. The sequence illustrates the extent to which Billy's existence is an unstable mix of fantasy and reality organized by images and surfaces.

Billy's solitary existence is disrupted one night by a phone call from a former classmate who asks him to a party. When their plans go awry, Billy heads home. Suddenly he hears lounge music and is drawn into a nearby apartment building. He wanders upstairs and into a party. As he walks through the front door the guests part to reveal a mysterious blonde woman standing in the centre of the room. She is, Billy tells the viewer, the living, breathing personification of his ideals: "My mythical virgin slut, my darling, darling Connie."

A series of uncomfortable attempts at communication culminates with Billy's discovery of a note in his highball glass. The message, scrawled on a matchbook cover and punctuated with a lipstick smear reads, "Come and we shall share the sunrise...at the Flamingo. #12." Billy hurries to the Flamingo Motel, where he is soon joined by the mysterious blonde. Once in the room, she turns on the television (a western appears); the radio (Connie Francis's "Who's Sorry Now?" plays); the heat; and the lights as she and Billy hurriedly remove their winter coats, gloves, and scarves and then, embrace. Billy begins to unzip "Connie's" dress when suddenly and without warning she falls limp. At the same moment the circuits blow and the room goes dark. Undaunted by this development, Billy decides to transport "Connie" back to his suite in the hope that the change of scenery will rouse her. Once back at his apartment, Billy tries to awaken his sleeping beauty with a kiss, but to no avail. The next day Billy wraps "Connie" in his collection of pin-ups and throws her into a nearby lake. He returns home, packs up some things, and leaves. "I decided I needed a change," he says. "A little trip was in order. I wasn't exactly sure where or for how long, but I knew there was nothing left for me in my little suite on Apple Street. I wanted to get past the gloss and into the fiber of things. Yes, I dare say I felt like an entirely new man."

The Obsession of Billy Botski is a fascinating assemblage of intertextual references—of surfaces—that alternately conceals and reveals its origins in the mythology of American popular culture. Like Billy's suite, less a living space than a museum of vintage cheesecake pin-ups and cheesy record albums, "Connie" is a collection of affectations. She wears an oversized wig that fits so poorly it both obscures her face and appears to be on backwards. Her elbow-length gloves and bright red stockings do not accentuate her shape, but draw

attention to their own status as artifice. Her clothing and accessories suggest a last minute Halloween costume, or even more precisely, the glad rags of a low-rent drag queen. "Connie" thus, is, to quote Sontag, "not a woman, but a 'woman'": she is the sum total of a system of simulations, a person "passing" as a woman. Like the fantasy woman conjured up by Billy's painted nails at the beginning of the film, "Connie" exists only in and as a fantastic *mise-en-scène*—a play of light, shadow, and music.

Just as Billy's earlier fantasy comes to a premature conclusion when the phone rings and the record spins to a halt, so too, his encounter with "Connie" ends when the overloaded circuits blow and the electricity in the motel room goes off. The suggestion is that "Connie," like Billy's other objects of desire, is an illusion, and a cinematic one at that. She is a com-



Camp and Bette Davis in
Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?

14 Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 135-170.

15 Scott Long, "The Loneliness of Camp," in Bergman, 78-91.

16 While I see Long's point, I fear he overestimates even the most intelligent viewer's political sensibilities, and vastly underestimates the public's tolerance of offensive or problematic content.

posite of Connies: her appearance calls to mind the blonde, petite television star Connie Stevens, and yet through the song that plays on the radio, she is also identified with another Connie from the 1950s and '60s, Connie Francis.

Francis, of course, is a veritable camp icon whose heart-breaking songs of unrequited love and steadfast devotion frequently leave listeners in a camp-induced dilemma. As a friend once remarked, "Camp is that feeling you get when you listen to Connie Francis singing 'Mamma.' You want to laugh and cry at the same time." Francis's many highly public tragedies, too, make her, like gay icon Judy Garland a living image of triumph over adversity. For these reasons, Francis's songs are perennial favorites among drag performers. "Where the Boys Are" is a standard for female impersonators, outranked only by the risqué "Pussycat Song" by another Connie—Connie Vannett.

Paizs followed up *Obsession* with a trilogy of films known as "The Three Worlds of Nick." Originally planned as a feature,¹⁷ these three short films tell the story of another quiet loner, not too far-removed from Billy Botski in his self-absorbed obsessions. In the first installment, *Springtime In Greenland* (1981), Nick lives at home with his parents, his sister, and the family dog, Barky. At a family barbecue Nick becomes the unwitting rival of the overbearing and aptly named Corny Blower. Blower, like "Connie" in *Obsession*, is a collection of gender stereotypes. His hairy-chested, mustachioed macho is pure 1970s Harry Reems; his behavior is that of a superannuated high school jock. He, Nick, and another party guest engage in a game of "Pig," to show off their diving prowess. When Corny fears he may lose, he cheats and causes Nick to falter. A fight ensues, and the party breaks up. The next day Nick stays in bed instead of attending the annual "First Sunday in Spring Parade." Barky, however, attends on her own. The narrator explains, "Barky loves parades."

With its perky musical score and matter-of-fact editing, *Springtime* looks and sounds an old educational film. And in its own peculiar way, it is an educational film: it is an ethnographic study of the mating rituals of the Canadian male. Unlike *Obsession*, *Springtime* does not focus exclusively on the fantasy world of a single character, but rather depicts a nexus of social interactions between a lead character and those around him. As the film opens, the citizens of Greenland are celebrating the arrival of Spring. On grassy lawns little girls dress their dolls and little boys unstring their baseball mitts. People in shorts water their lawns and trees burst into flower. The sound of car horns announces a wedding as a young couple poses on a bridge in the park. It is, the film's narrator explains, "the season of love. No one is beyond its powerful spell, and all the young of Greenland are out and about doing what comes naturally."

It is this "natural" behaviour that becomes the target of *Greenland's* dead-on mockery. In fact, judging from the images that accompany the narrator's statement, "what comes naturally" is the seasonal ritual of heterosexual coupling, a phenomenon enacted through a highly codified system of behaviours which, in its strict adherence to socio-cultural norms is anything but "natural." *Springtime in Greenland*, then, is a time for role playing.

At its mid-point, *Springtime* cuts away from Nick's story to what is effectively a self-contained intermission, entitled "The House of Tomorrow." The film shifts into high-camp mode as a smiling couple gives a tour of their new home, replete with all the latest gadgets, circa 1965. Guests ooh and aah appreciatively over such "modern miracles" as a hidden soap-dish, a garbage disposal, a pop-up toaster, and a flushable toilet. The *pièce de résistance* of the tour, however, seems to be the sprinkler system. When the homeowners turn it on, their guests run into the glistening streams where they cavort about as if they've never seen water before.

"The House of Tomorrow" segment is an exacting replica, played with deadpan earnestness, of countless promotional films aimed at housewives and newlyweds. The message of these short subjects was as unvarying as it was clear: domestic bliss can be attained only through conspicuous consumption. Paizs's parody, unlike its real-life inspirations, plays up the incongruity between the awe and excitement with which everyday innovations are met and the relatively simple uses to which these appliances are put. In addition to interrupting the flow of the narrative and foreshadowing Paizs's use of a similar device in later films, "The House of Tomorrow" establishes, metonymically, Nick's domestic environment: the frilly curtains, the shag carpet, and the velvet chairs together become an image of the home-as-diorama that records to the smallest detail a way of life centered around the domestic sphere and its maintenance, which, while not extinct, has been irrevocably altered by the passage of time.¹⁸ Like Billy Botski's memorabilia-filled flat, the world of Nick is packed with consumer culture clutter past its prime. But whereas in *Obsession*, these artifacts could be seen as nostalgic, if somewhat fetishistic, now, in *Springtime*, they read as kitsch.

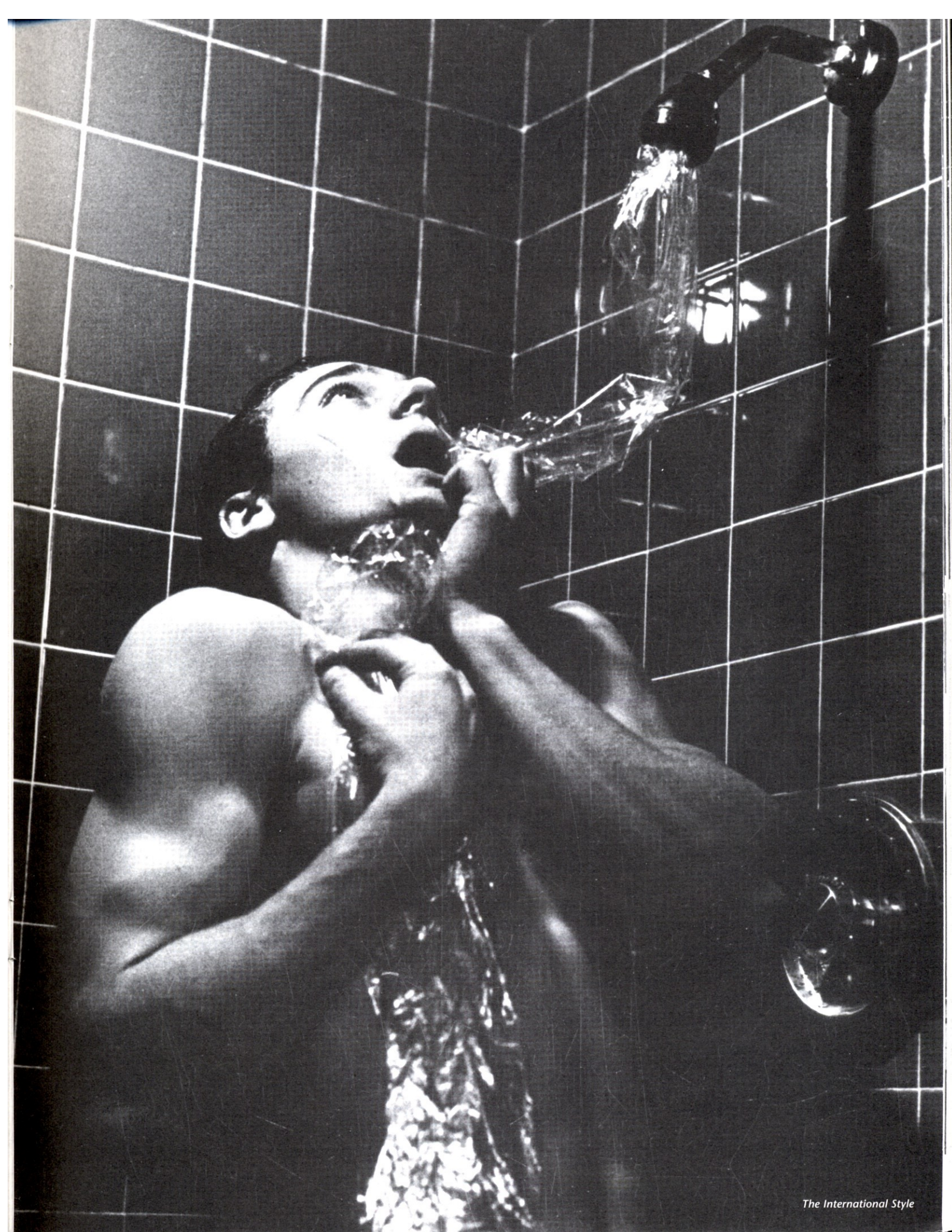
The second installment in the Nick trilogy, the black and white *Oak, Ivy, and Other Dead Elms* (1982) departs radically from Paizs's colorful earlier work. It shares the chiaroscuro look and funereal feel of Guy Maddin's *The Dead Father* (1985), and like Maddin's film, explores how the overwhelming and somewhat destructive influence of the past over the present. *Oak, Ivy, and Other Dead Elms* is Paizs's most thoroughgoing and impeccably structured critique of the smothering hold of outmoded and oppressive values on contemporary society.

The film opens as Nick arrives at college and meets up with a group of retro-crazed college "boys," played by actors who, with the exception of a very youthful-looking Kyle McCulloch, might be more suited to playing the parents of college students. These guys love big band music, and spend their time trying to recreate a secret society from their college's long forgotten past. As Nick's roommate Brock (Peter Jordan), the fraternity's ringleader, remarks, "Nothing is so far gone it can't be lived right here, right now."

Brock mouths platitudes and suffers from flashbacks involving diseased trees. When a candidate for student body presi-

17 "The Three Worlds of Nick" was always meant to be a trilogy—a feature, actually, that I could finance and make in manageable stages. I wrote scripts for the second and third parts as I went along, as it were." John Paizs in an interview with the author, October 1999.

18 A modern day equivalent of this view of the home can be seen in Gary Burns's *Kitchen Party* (Canada, 1997).



dent, Heck Stefanyck (Greg Klymkiw) announces his plans to reclaim and renovate the Coat Room, the abandoned hall that serves as the secret society's meeting place, Brock and his cohorts jump into the race with an all-out political campaign. They promise lower tuition rates and besmirch the character of their opponents. Their efforts pay off, and Brock is elected. Things go terribly wrong, though, when the new regime attempts to institute their ultra-conservative policies: they censor books, music, and film, and bring in a troop of black-uniformed guards armed with two-way radios. The film ends when, at an extravagant black tie affair a series of misunderstandings results in the accidental death of Brock's vice president. Believing an assassination attempt is underway, Brock and company lock down the dance hall and go into code-red defense strategies. When all is said and done, Brock and his opponent both end up dead.

Like Paizs's other works, *Oak, Ivy, and Other Dead Elms* exhibits its director's eye for camp. The casting of middle-aged men as college students underscores the preposterously outdated values that Brock and his cronies espouse. Like Corny Blower and "Connie," their highly codified behaviour undercuts rather than reinforces the standard gender roles to which their actions so rigidly conform. Their strict rules of conduct, borrowed from a forgotten era of "normalcy," become anachronistic caricatures of a long-outmoded view of "masculinity."

The International Style (1983), the third and final part of the Nick trilogy, is a brilliantly colored art deco movie nightmare that plays like *Seven Footprints to Satan* (Christensen, USA 1929) remade as a Technicolor Maria Montez vehicle. The film is populated by wildly incongruous characters, including a dandy, his sister, an evil masseuse, assorted mafia types, crazed hillbillies, vaguely European villains, and their James-Bond-film-inspired henchmen. Its setting, a Xanadu-esque castle called "Starland," is located in the middle of cowboy territory. Into this highly artificial world steps Nick, now an international jewel thief not unlike the character played by Cary Grant in Hitchcock's *To Catch A Thief* (1955). *The International Style* is a ready-made fantasy culled from the discarded excesses of 1950s drive-in and matinee fare. The film, like the collage films of Bruce Conner or Joseph Cornell, pulls together superficial elements from different genres and recombines them into a movie that, in its amazingly hybridized final form, is, as critic Umberto Eco has said of *Casablanca* (Curtiz, USA 1942) not a movie, but "the movies."¹⁹

What is most interesting about this final installment in the "Three Worlds of Nick" trilogy is that, following a debacle involving the invasion of Starland by cake-crazed cowboys, the film ends with a shot of Nick and his wife at poolside with a baby. Their home is obviously the same house as the setting for *Springtime in Greenland*. What this shot intimates, when taken in the context of the trilogy's overall structure, is that the plots of the second and third films are, in fact, part of a dream—the product of Nick's overactive and movie-addled imagination. Of course, such an interpretation invites comparisons, as Geoff Pevere has noted of *Crime Wave* after it,²⁰ to *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, USA 1939), albeit as a perversely inverted mirror image of the earlier film.

As with *The Wizard of Oz* the film opens with a character who is disillusioned with his/her surroundings. A traumatic experience is followed by a series of misadventures, ending with the realization that there's no place like home. The execution of the three Nick films echoes the stylistic codes of Fleming's film in reverse: whereas *The Wizard of Oz* is composed of opening and closing segments in black and white with the fantastic section in the middle, the Nick films open and close in color, with the center fantasy material black and white. This stylistic device serves to underscore the backwards-looking nature of Nick's fantasy life—a monochromatic world ordered by the images of classic Hollywood movies. The title of the final installment, too, *The International Style*, suggests that the Hollywood styles appropriated by the film, together represent a collective "international" style of film making designed, defined, and distributed by the American entertainment industry.

Paizs's *Crime Wave* (1986), like his shorts, deals specifically with movie culture. The film details the misadventures of Steven Penny (Paizs again) a promising young screenwriter who finds himself unable to write anything but beginnings and endings of stories. His hilariously fragmented "colour crime film" scripts feature such unlikely criminals as an Elvis impersonator, a self-help guru, and a pair of Amway-type sales reps. Steven struggles to come up with suitable storylines to fill in the space between his explosive openings and bloodbath conclusions, but fails time and again. As Steven becomes increasingly depressed and slips into near psychosis, his scripts and the film itself follow suit.

As with Paizs's earlier films, the narrative of *Crime Wave* proceeds in fits and starts, with plenty of detours along the way. After a typically lush, Technicolor-inspired credits sequence, the film bursts into action with a narrator shouting "The TOP!" over an obnoxious music track. The viewer is then introduced to a succession of "tribute artists," impersonators of famous musicians whose untimely deaths have rendered them cult icons. Buddy Holly, Sid Vicious, and Hank Williams impersonators, the narrator explains, have the big time tribute racket all tied up. "But from the North" comes Ronny Boyles, an Elvis Presley impersonator who becomes an overnight sensation after knocking-off the owner of a run-down club he plays. Just when the film seems to be kicking in, the narrative is interrupted as the film cuts to a fresh-faced girl (Eva Kovacs) who explains, "That's the beginning of one of Steven Penny's unfinished versions of *Crime Wave*." The girl, we later learn, is Kim, the daughter of Steven's landlord.

Steven, like Billy and Nick before him, leads a quiet existence in a cramped, memorabilia-stuffed apartment. However, after Steven suffers a near nervous breakdown and his apartment is overrun by rats, Kim decides to help him realize his authorial aspirations. She writes a letter to Dr. Jolly, a professional "script doctor" whose advertisements in Steven's *Colour Crime Quarterly* magazines proclaim his techniques an unqualified success. What Kim does not realize, however, when she sends Steven off to Kansas for a *rendezvous* with the good doctor is that Dr. Jolly has lapsed into madness and has become a psychopathic serial killer who has left a trail of sex crimes across the American Midwest.

It appears at first that fate has intervened to rescue Steven from the mad doctor when, upon arriving in Kansas a state trooper forces the bus on which he is riding to pull over several miles short of the city where the meeting is to take place. There has been, it seems, some sort of accident involving radioactive material that has necessitated the immediate evacuation of all citizens and the destruction of any domestic animals unfortunate enough to have been left behind. Steven continues with his journey on foot, however, and eventually keeps his fateful appointment with Dr. Jolly.

Crime Wave is, like Paizs's earlier work, an extremely complex motion picture, filled with references to other films, as well as to various events in the shared cultural histories of the USA and Canada. Its semiotic intricacy renders the film nearly impossible to describe. *Crime Wave* is above all, an *exercice de style*, a collection of surfaces and fragments that do not make sense until they are placed together. It is, in short, a camp object *par excellence*. As Jack Babuscio notes "in film, the aesthetic element in camp further implies a movement away from contemporary concerns into realms of exotic or subject fantasies; the depiction of states of mind that are (in terms of commonly accepted taboos and standards) suspect; an emphasis on sensuous surfaces, textures, imagery, and the evocation of mood as *stylistic devices*—not simply because they are appropriate to the plot, but as fascinating in themselves." (22)

Paizs himself has commented that he drew the inspiration for *Crime Wave* not, as many have assumed, from the films of the 1950s, but instead, from *trailers* for 1950s films. "An animator acquaintance had a great collection of 1950s B-movie trailers on 16mm that he ran for George Toles and me one night. I remember thinking then that they had to be a thousand times more entertaining than the actual features they were promoting. They made a huge impression on me. The result is that in *Crime Wave* I'm not actually parodying 1950s B-movies, which are, for the most part, really slow and boring, as much as I'm parodying their trailers, which are fast and fantastic."²¹

Paizs places himself in the midst of this world when, in a sequence just before the apartment becomes infested by rats, Steven spends an evening with the characters from his colour crime films. As Steven sits alone in his apartment he imagines a drunken conversation between the protagonists of his various projects. Steven watches helplessly as their conversation deteriorates into arguments and then violence. What makes this particular sequence especially interesting is that while Paizs-as-Steven places himself among the characters he has created, he then goes one step further by including a poster of his own "The Three Worlds of Nick" trilogy placed inconspicuously among the other B-movie posters in his apartment. In fact, Paizs's name is only visible in one or two shots, and then, is nearly obscured by the bodies of the fighting men. Such a move begins to erode the distinction between Steven Penny and John Paizs, and serves to underscore the artificial nature of identity. The inclusion of this material points toward the artificiality of Paizs's role-playing and creates, for those whose sensibilities allow them to recognize the codes, a particular type of humor that arises from the incongruity between representation and reality.

Paizs spotlights this split in a sequence that takes place a little over ten minutes into the film. Steven invites Kim into his apartment and there explains the processes of film making to her. He shows her his Bolex camera, Kodak color film, and a collection of other film-making necessities. He also demonstrates the phenomenon of persistence of vision for her. He draws the outline of a body, complete with a green "blood-stain" on a white sheet of paper and places a black dot in the middle of the stain. Kim then explains in voice over that she (and the audience) is to stare directly at the black dot for two choruses of "When The Saints Go Marching In" as played on the harmonica. When the page is flipped the outline of the body will appear as a ghostly projected image on the white screen of the page.

The film then cuts to a close-up of the drawing, and when the page is flipped at the end of the second chorus, the screen goes blank, save for a black dot at its centre. The spectator, who may or may not experience the phenomenon explained in the previous moments, is left sitting in the dark and staring at a (nearly) blank screen. The narrative grinds to a halt, just as Paizs's earlier works have done, as the viewer is left to ponder a dark spot on a white field—a punctuation mark of sorts that indicates the transition from one part of the film to the next. The heretofore invisible processes, both technical and intertextual, by which the "magic" of movies is achieved are thus exposed by means of a magnificently simple gesture.

The film playfully reveals the invisible mechanisms of production and spectatorship to its audience, weaving scenes of subtle demystification into a narrative fabric of fascination, nostalgia, and cinephilia. It revels in the flash and artifice of Hollywood movies, while at the same time, uncovering the hidden workings behind the stardust and tinsel to comment on the profound social influences exerted both on and by cinema's idealized images. Paizs's use of persistence of vision—the physiological phenomenon by which the viewer mistakenly perceives the discreet images of the filmstrip as one continuous, moving image—suggests the existence of a *persistent vision*—a view that sees between the bits of clutter, between the images themselves, to recognize the larger social significance of movies, both for them and for the filmmaker—peculiar to the camp-sensitive viewer. It is *Crime Wave's* symbolic recognition of the network of intertextual references upon which it is built. Moreover, in playfully calling attention to the artifice of the film, Paizs's action can be seen as the ultimate camp gesture: the triumph of surface (the blank silver screen) over content.

19 Of *Casablanca's* construction from various archetypal images and plot devices Eco writes, "*Casablanca* has succeeded in becoming a cult movie because it is not one movie. It is 'the movies.' And this is the reason it works, in spite of any aesthetic theory." Umberto Eco, *Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage*, *SubStance* 47 (1985), 10. Eco goes on to say that Curtiz's film differs from later, postmodern works because its incorporation of archetypal material is unconscious, not calculated.

20 Geoff Pevere, *Crime Wave*, *Cinema Canada* January 1986.

21 John Paizs, interview with the author, October 1999.

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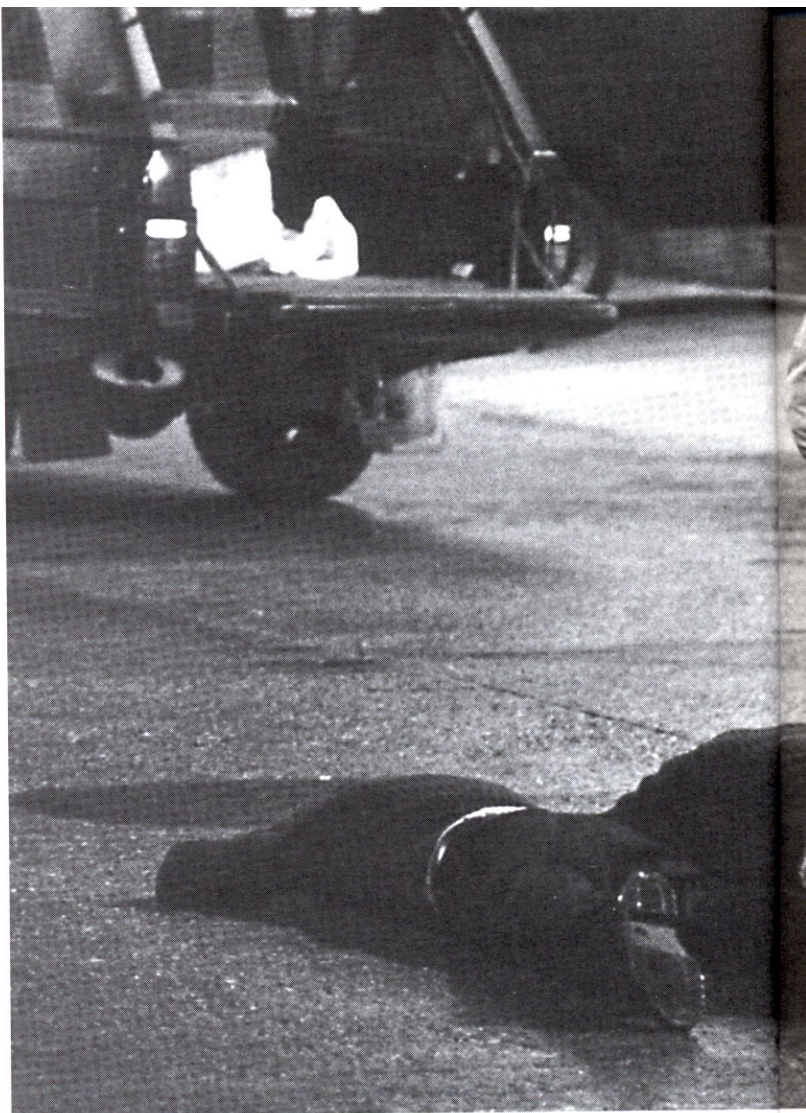
The New Face of British Heritage

by **Deborah Tudor**

Current definitions of heritage films focus on narratives of privilege that present a very narrow image of British cultural heritage, one anchored by literary, aristocratic visions. The abandonment of the term heritage to an upper-class point of view overlooks too many cycles of British films while giving a privileged position to a restricted worldview. One of these overlooked cycles is the contemporary British crime film which reworks conventions of the 1940s British spiv cycle. The spiv cycle featured a noirish world of flash-dressing, petty black market racketeers, who thrived in the specific historic context of the postwar underworld economy. Some contemporary British crime films enact this cinematic heritage of class and crime, providing rich territory for a historical analysis of forms of white British masculinity. Such analysis opens up the notion of heritage and in turn may illuminate relationships among gender, class and nation.

Thomas Elsaesser has argued that what nations sell as national cinema in the international film market is their history. This is certainly true of the heritage film segment of the British film industry, as these films display both class and literary traditions. What British heritage films sell is specifically a history of class that, while concentrated in the aristocratic, fuels plot lines with a small inoculation of class conflict.

The recognized heritage films emphasize the aristocratic worldview, and minimally sympathize with the outsiders.



Limiting the term "heritage" to films that substitute the class narratives of the aristocrats for broader-based narratives of all classes promotes a very conservative image of the past's importance and of our usage of the past. Reclaiming the term heritage for a wider selection of narratives dethrones the aristocratic worldview from its privileged place as the history and heritage of Britain.

The recent film *Face* (Antonia Bird, 1997) reworks conventions of the spiv film, and can be understood as an "urban heritage" film which emphasizes a working-class narrative, albeit one that is white and masculine. Like the spiv film, it constructs a particular politicized world, one that embodies characteristics of the social and economic legacies of Thatcherism.

Crime and Heritage

Peter Wollen argues for the spiv films as heritage films and I agree. The heritage film category can be defined through an urban strain, in which spiv films, based on clearly-defined working class milieus, reside. Contemporary British crime dramas partake of this different strain of heritage, an urban one with cinematic roots in the spiv cycle, which first appeared in the closing years of World War II. The spiv was not an "ordinary" criminal, but one whose crimes were linked to conditions of living, specifically the state regulation of economy and rationing that produced the black market. The spiv



became "the man who" could get you...stockings, tires, cigarettes etc. Spivs were also noted for their flashy dress, which some critics says represents a "flashy flaunting of authority and petty regulations".¹ Other sources suggest that the spiv mode of dress was taken from Hollywood gangster films. Despite their flash suits and ties, spivs were an indigenous type *originating* from the wartime black market economy, which continued to grow with post-war rationing. The films of this cycle also represent an intersection of crime and class, presenting concrete portraits of "life and work within the community combined with transports of demonic evil." The spiv film flourished between 1945 and 1950, the years of the first post-war Labor government, when the working class gain real power for the first time. Spiv films constitute one of the first British film cycles clearly based in a working-class milieu.²

As a member of the community, the spiv occupied an ambivalent place in World War II and post-war Britain:

...there were mixed attitudes toward the spiv in the community; people "knew a man who..." Attitudes varied from moral outrage to a justification of sharp dealing as the way to preserve the family".³

The attitudes described here proceed partly from a masculinized worldview. The mixed attitudes reveal the choice of fami-

ly or community as the basic unit of social cohesion and identity. If you choose the community, then the spiv is morally corrupt; if you choose the family then you justify the black-market dealings in order to keep your family safe. This reveals implicit tensions between the welfare of the individual family and the welfare of the community that often becomes submerged by the 1990s rhetoric of family values which aligns the well-being of the family (blood ties) with the well-being of the larger community, in this case the (civic) nation.

The parameters of masculinity also shift within this context, as western culture has traditionally defined masculinity through knowledges and competencies, such as providing for one's family, and competition for "business" success. In the symbolic realm, these elements sanction the spiv as a masculine type able to succeed in a toughly competitive situation, when resources are scarce. Additionally, those men who bought goods from spivs/black market could justify this in terms of family provision. The rationalization of the spiv in this context proceeds from a masculinized worldview.

The spiv image transgresses unitary illusions of nation and class in favor of individual and/or family welfare. The figure of the spiv elucidates the fact that the struggles to get through

1 Peter Wollen, "Riff-Raff Realism," *Sight and Sound* 8.4 (1998): 19-20.

2 Wollen 20.

3 Raynes Minns, *Bombers and Mash: The Home Front 1939-1945* (London: Virago Press, 1980), 159.

daily life and find its necessities really depend upon your ability to pay. This realization bluntly undercuts any illusory unity that dominated much public discourse during the World War II years. Spiv films reasserted class distinctions that the national identity tried to downplay during the war.

Spiv films are also the site of oscillation between realism and excess, both of which have been cited as privileged markers of British cinema. "The spiv's charisma combined with the melodrama of the cycle's persecuted innocent motif" spun the realist impulse toward the realm of heated-up romanticism."⁴

Heritage Films

Current usage of the critical category, "heritage film" exists within a wider context of the larger British heritage industry. This industry is based upon the sale of the past: stately homes, gardens, various historical sites, souvenirs associated with such sites, music, reissue of "classic" literature, clothing and home accessories based upon historical themes.

David Cannadine, in *The Pleasures of the Past*, notes that heritage industry is seen as offering images of stability in times of upheaval.⁵ Heritage films do this through aristocratic heritage narratives, thus inscribing the history of one class as the history of all. Heritage films present the past as an artifact of the lives of the elite. Additionally, the heritage film often derives from a literary source which is already identified as "great literature," so this category yields a double strand of cultural and literary heritages. One strain of criticism dismisses the heritage film as simple nostalgia for a clearly defined social hierarchy. However, critics like John Hill suggest that the pleasures of the heritage film are more complex. He argues that our enjoyment of the heritage film lies in the relationship between its past and our present. We enjoy the predicament of the characters trapped in social conventions (an acknowledgement that the world of the heritage film was not perfect) because we have access to ways of being not available to characters. So in a sense, he argues, we receive a license to enjoy the class-structured narratives by our own modern perspectives.⁶

While heritage films like *Howard's End* and *The Remains of the Day* certainly focus on the aristocratic conception of life as an ordered hierarchy, they also present narratives in which class conflicts fuel the plot. The educational pretensions of Leonard Bast are mocked by the upper class Wilcoxes in *Howard's End*. In *Remains of the Day*, Mr. Stevens, the butler, lets class hierarchy and his sense of duty to his aristocratic employer, supersede family ties and personal desires. Our recognition of these dilemmas allows us, in Hill's terms, to perceive ourselves as a culture in which class structures no longer impose such limitations and lack of choice on some of our fellow citizens.

This small amount of inoculation, to use Roland Barthes' term, frees us to immerse ourselves in the sensuous surface of these films while ignoring the class context that enabled these aristocratic lifestyles to exist. Our acceptance of the worth of these films proceeds partly from this inoculation's effect; we congratulate ourselves that we have progressed and therefore it is okay to relax and feel sorry for these upper-class characters, their losses, their problems. They are, after all, our heritage.

This is where the category's problem lies. Yes, these films

have been defined as representing a conservative heritage for the nation, but wide critical acceptance of that term's limits and the almost formulaic descriptions of this category's content indicate a disturbing complacency. The heritage tag should be reworked so that heritage films contain a wider spectrum of class-based narratives. I suppose in one sense, this takes us perilously close to arguing over the naming of shadows. However, the actuality of the history lying behind these shadows gets muddled when a term like heritage is reserved for its current use.

Analysts of the heritage industry recognize several different strains within it: the aristocratic, the rustic, and the industrial.⁷ Similarly, creating a group of subcategories to apply to heritage films would broaden the term and indicate the complexity of Britain's national heritages.

Recent British Crime Films

Recent British crime films, such as *Face*, (1997, Antonia Bird) rework some conventions and context of the earlier spiv film and constructs clear relationships of these elements to contemporary British society. Like the spiv films, *Face* is set within clearly defined working-class milieus and represents some ways that working class male characters negotiate the reworking of traditional, class-defined masculine roles. I will examine *Face*'s use of elements of the spiv film, and ways in which race, class, and gender relations are constructed in this particular segment of British film heritage, an urban heritage.

Face wrapped shooting just days before the "New Labor" victory in May 1997, and was released in Britain the following September. In the film, Robert Carlyle plays Ray, a former trades union activist whose idealism has yielded to cynicism. Although Ray no longer sees any value in his former life as a political activist, his mother Alice, and girlfriend Connie remain politically active. Ray's crew includes older, married mate Dave, the violent Julian, his childlike pal Stevie, and Jason, the youthful nephew of East End crime lord "Sonny". They pull off a payroll robbery that goes awry after they realize that their take is much smaller than anticipated. The next morning, Dave comes to Ray's house claiming that he's been attacked and someone has stolen his share of the swag. Ray, Stevie and Dave investigate; Stevie and Ray's shares are also missing, and the elderly couple who hid it for them are dead. Group loyalty quickly crumbles as they suspect Julian, but a visit there reveals his money missing as well. They next find Jason dead, and Ray figures out that Dave is the traitor. Dave reveals that Chris, a bent cop who dates his daughter Sara, has forced him to steal the cash. The gang confronts Chris. Dave strangles Chris, and Ray shoots Dave. They attempt to recover the money that Chris has hidden in his station locker. Julian grabs all the cash, shoots Stevie in the leg, and is caught in a bloody shootout with the cops while Ray and Stevie flee in Alice's car. At an M1 service stop, they rendezvous with Connie and the three drive away into the night.

Face walks the same boundary as the earlier spiv films, between drama and melodrama, with its politically disillusioned protagonist who anguishes over his life choices. It places its story within the identifiable setting of London's East

End, and creates a web of specific political and social background circumstances that evoke the legacy of Thatcherism, and define Ray's actions.

The Web of Politics

The character of Ray echoes the spiv because his actions are defined by the shifting economic and sociopolitical conditions in England. He has deliberately rejected a subjectivity formed within a community-oriented group for individual gain in a marginalized working class underworld. This separates this type of character from other generic crime characters. The choice between law and outlaw is an obvious parameter of this genre, but in spiv films and in *Face*, the choice lies between two positions that are more clearly politically defined and in these cases, historically concrete.

John Hill's analysis of British crime films of the eighties demonstrates that the "[...] 'gangster's commitment to enterprise' is directly linked to the 'enterprise culture' encouraged by Thatcherism and to a valorization of small business that stands at odds with the logic of international capital. This places the films within a conservative tradition by aligning gangsters with "emblems of both 'tradition' and traditional conceptions of the nation".⁸ *Face* identifies the gangsters not so much with community and national tradition but with breaks in communal structures leading to individualism and self-interest.

Claire Monk argues that the impact of an increased complexity of public attitudes toward crime is the most influential social factor on British crime cinema in the 1990s. She says this is not merely "lack of consensus in public opinion regarding certain areas of activity defined by the law as 'criminal' (e.g. drugs) but an increasingly evident gulf between the law and actual behavior of the public. In many working-class communities where the closure of local industries had brought multi-generational unemployment, theft and drug dealing became normalized as strategies for survival."⁹ This complex attitude is an inexact echo of the ambiguity of attitudes toward the spiv in 1940s Britain. In both cases, historically different, specific socio-economic factors produce similar effects, a shift in attitudes toward the acceptability of "criminal" activity.

Ray's change to an individualist and, as later discussed, narrowly familial, subjectivity represents a legacy from the basic tenets of Thatcherism's dual economic and social program. "[...] the 'family', along with the 'individual', ...was often invoked as the key social and economic unit in the rhetoric of Thatcherism ...which involved an assault on 'intermediary' institutions such as local authorities and public authorities



4 Wollen 20.

5 David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (London: Collins, 1989), 257-8, quoted in John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 74.

6 John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 73-98.

7 Hill, *British Cinema* 77.

8 John Hill, "Allegorizing the Nation: British Gangster Films of the 1980s," *British Crime Cinema*, ed. Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy (London: Routledge, 1999), 160-171.

9 Claire Monk, "From Underworld to Underclass: Crime and British Crime Cinema in the 1980s," *British Crime Cinema*, ed. Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy (London: Routledge, 1999), 184.

10 Hill, *British Cinema* 10fn.



that stood between the state and individuals and their families. It is this attack on 'civil society' that underpins Margaret Thatcher's notorious claim... that 'There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families'.¹⁰ Ray, like the spiv fifty years earlier, represents a politicized choice between individualist, and communal subjectivities. His former role as a trades union activist places him among a group that became a primary opponent to Thatcherist policies: "[...]trade unions, whose commitment to collective rights and blanket protections stood in direct conflict with her (Thatcher's) belief in the unrestricted play of free markets."¹¹ Ray's abandonment of activism stems from his disillusionment with the ability of the trade unions to shape public policy.

The political web that the film places around Ray's actions reminds us of the legacy of Thatcherism's "dismantling of the state" and also that personal choices are political ones and impact society. *Face* merges a number of elements: references to real-life political injustice, flashback, background radio and television news reports, posters and graffiti, and specific East End locales to construct a highly politicized environment for Ray's actions.

Reference to Real-Life Political Injustices

The opening crime sequence is a drug raid staged by Dave and Ray who pose as cops to seize a junkie's heroin stash. Ex-political prisoner, Gerry Conlon, plays the junkie. Conlon's unjust imprisonment for an IRA bombing he did not commit, was the subject of Jim Sheridan's 1993 film *In the Name of the Father*.

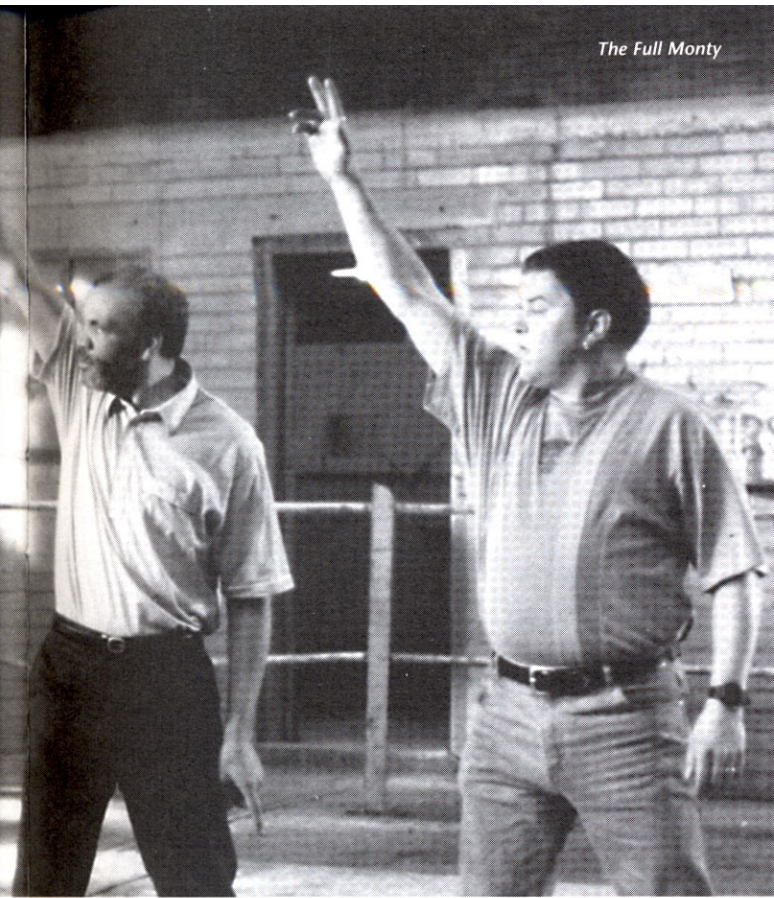
Flashbacks

The other members of the gang joke about Ray's past as "Red Ray", and the film visually underlines Ray's position as a for-

mer activist during the Thatcher years, through brief flashbacks of his protest days. The flashbacks begin after the robbery. Ray's role in the holdup is that of hostage minder and timekeeper. He holds a gun on the counting room workers who are huddled together in a corner while he shouts out the time remaining to his crew. The shots of Ray and the hostages occur in the familiar shot/reverse shot pattern: medium close-ups, and close-ups of one or two frightened hostages' faces are followed by three increasingly tight shots of Ray's face: a medium close-up, a close-up, and an extreme close-up of his eyes. These shots reveal Ray's extreme discomfort and tension that could be explained by the stress of the robbery. In retrospect this shot sequence really establishes a series of flashbacks that explain Ray's discomfort at holding these people hostage.

The film uses four flashbacks that allow spectators to "read" Ray. The first and shortest flashback occurs before the job; this one reveals a quick stab of Ray's memory of (Gerry Conlon) begging them to leave him just a little heroin. Clearly Ray feels guilty about this.

The next three flashbacks really cement the source of Ray's unease. The first occurs in his bedroom late in the evening after the robbery. Ray stands by a window that mirrors his reflection. His flashback reveals a line of nightstick-wielding police in riot gear advancing on a group of demonstrators, including Ray. This is intercut with a brief flashback of Ray herding the frightened security depot workers into the corner during the raid. This technique establishes links between Ray's former activism and his current career in armed robbery, emphasizing his change from communal orientation to individualism. It also establishes an unpleasant link between the police treatment of demonstrators and Ray's terrorization of the workers. This flashback also foreshadows the knowledge of



the real source of Ray's "jobs". As he discovers, the crooked cop, Chris, has been feeding Dave information and setting up jobs for the crew. Since Chris controls Dave and through him the crew, Ray is in fact, performing the will of a policeman.

This link makes an interesting suggestion: that state institutions control and profit from the actions of the working class by limiting their options. This is one way that the film enacts contemporary social concerns with white working class males. The third flashback occurs just after the police nearly catch the gang in the house where Jason and his uncle Sonny lie murdered. As Ray and Stevie escape through a group of children, Ray flashes back again to images of the demo being busted up by cops. The shot/reverse shot structure here echoes the other flashbacks as the faces of schoolchildren contrast with the hostages' faces. The final flashback occurs just before the film ends, as Ray searches for Connie at the M1 service stop.

This intercutting links Ray's present activity with his past union activism and suggests that the two impulses represent choices of subjectivities for him. As an activist, Ray identified with the community, as an armed robber he identifies with an individualist, masculinized ethos of a small group operating outside the law for personal gain. The intercutting emphasizes Ray's present choice as a cynical response to his inability to accomplish his political goals. When working for the community fails, he decides that it's time for "me first".

The film also circumscribes possibilities for success outside the law through dialog and plot events. First, the gang fails abysmally; as it transpires, they are unknowing pawns of a corrupt police officer who is able to control Dave by dating Dave's young daughter. He exercises this control over Dave by slipping him information about potential jobs and then taking a

major cut. A policeman, an instrument of the state, directs their outlaw activity. They do not get away with anything; by the film's end, all the gang die except Ray and Stevie.

Ray also articulates his lack of success as a robber when he tells Jason, the youngest member of his crew, that over the last ten years he could have made more money driving a lorry. Even outlaw success is illusory for working class males. Ray's choice of job comparisons also points out his limited legitimate choices.

Every choice that the gang members could make is limited and controlled by the state. Even success in an illegal activity is controlled by state institutions, which suggests that the state exerts a stranglehold on the ability of the working class male to move outside of strictly delineated hierarchies.

Media

A motif of radio and television news reports woven into the diegesis also emphasizes the politicized context. When Ray and Stevie drop off their share of the money at Bill and Linda's house for safekeeping, a background television displays a story about homeless people receiving clothes at a shelter. When Ray confronts Julian, an initial suspect for stealing the robbery take, Julian is watching a video. He switches it off and a television news report on a hospital closing due to privatization comes on. As Dave and Stevie wait for Ray outside Julian's apartment, the car radio reports on a government plan to extend electronic tagging of criminals to juvenile offenders. These media reports reinforce the individualist-communal choice by their reference to the dismantling of social services under Thatcherism, and the consequent emphasis on the individual not relying on civil society, or the community, for help. Specifically, within the text, these references remind us that Stevie would be adrift without help were it not for Ray and Connie who have taken him in. This motif links us back to the discussion Ray has about ditching Stevie.

Mise-en-Scene: Posters & Graffiti

Ray and Connie's bedroom has a poster of Ken Loach's political film *Hidden Agenda* hanging on the wall. This poster is prominently framed between Ray and Connie during a long scene the night after the raid. Several scenes feature scrawled political graffiti on exterior walls, lines like "Vote Apathy" (which could be taken as a comment on the election imminent during the film's shooting), and "Porn Stinks".

Mise-en-Scene: Locales

Like the earlier spiv films, *Face* uses very specific and identifiable locations from the East End of London. Julian's flat is on the Isle of Dogs, Jason and his uncle Sonny live in Harringay,¹² and specific street signs (Wendon Street, Mattison Road) are visible throughout the action. The locales avoid the iconic locations often seen in London films for less well-known areas, recognizable primarily to Londoners. Such use of locations aligns the film more closely with the realist tradition of British

11 Leonard Quart, "The Religion of the Market: Thatcherite Politics and British Film of the 1980s," *Fires Were Started*, ed. Lester Friedman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 18.

12 Phillip Kemp, Review of *Face*, *Sight and Sound* 7.10 (1997): 48.

films and departs from the image of London offered by British crime films of the 1980s, like *Stormy Monday* (Mike Figgis, 1987), *Mona Lisa* (Neil Jordan, (1986) and *The Hit* (Stephen Frears, 1984) which “invest the city with something of the mythic dimension that it has traditionally possessed in Hollywood thrillers”.¹³ This specificity helps anchor the film’s ideological work to concrete places, and thereby to conditions of contemporary class existence.

Family and Community

Ray has chosen a fraternal community, the gang, which emphasizes a more individualized masculine ethos of success and survival. This gang does not construct ties with the larger community, except practical ties with the criminal fraternity, an underground society. This distinctly contrasts with his previous activism, in which he chose community whose aims included uplift for larger society. That community was not exclusively male, as Ray often acted with his mother Alice and Connie. The choice Ray makes at the film’s end, to abandon this life and leave with Connie and Stevie, indicate the tentative formation of a community which once again includes women, and his friend Stevie.

Ray’s act of taking Stevie with them acknowledges his responsibility to Stevie, one which he had denied earlier in the film when he wanted to make Stevie find his own apartment. Stevie’s presence is a source of conflict between the two. Ray wants Stevie to move out, but Connie asserts that he cannot abandon Stevie. So when the three drive away together, it doesn’t represent a retreat into the family for Ray but a recommitment to community. He has opted to construct a family not by blood ties but by bonds of love. His previous denial was based upon the fact that Stevie “wasn’t family”, an echo of the Thatcherite use of “familialism”. By the film’s end, Ray has apparently returned to his earlier feelings about community. The nature of this plot problem, “what shall we do with Stevie?” echoes family-community conflict that provides context for the earlier spiv cycle. Ray’s resolution of this dilemma points toward a redefinition of “family” from blood ties to community ties, providing a representation that counters the Thatcher legacy of “individualist ethos” with its concomitant lessening of the “ethic of social responsibility and mutual aid”.¹⁴

Gender

Face also genders this politicization and the choice of communal or individualist subjectivities. The continued faith of Alice and Connie in the value of political organization contrasts vividly with the political disinterest of the male characters and provides a gendered construction of the negotiation of class-based problems.

Throughout the two days of the plot, the two women spend much of their time demonstrating against the deportation of Kurdish political prisoners. In addition, Connie administers a shelter for teen runaways, a project that is losing its council funding. Her work echoes two elements of *Face*’s use of media: the stories on the closure of the hospital, and the story about juvenile offenders. Ray met Connie through his mother, Alice; they were political allies. Connie stands in a figurative daugh-

ter’s place to Alice as she is both Alice’s spiritual inheritor, and the lover of her son.

The continued association of activism with the women and its abandonment by the men, genders the conflict, and emphasizes the gendered nature of the choices made by Ray. Although none of Ray’s mates have any overt political leanings, Dave admits to admiring Alice because she “has views...you don’t often see that nowadays.” This (almost literally for American audiences) throwaway bit of dialogue adds to the background of social malaise that structures the men’s world. It also differentiates the male criminals in this film from criminals in 1980s British crime films. Generally, the male criminal in those films is either passively or actively misogynist, and those narratives marginalized women as unimportant non-actors. Although they remain at the edges of the story, Connie and Alice have strongly active lives apart from the male world.

Women characters in the spiv films had a range of relationships with the spiv, and the underworld. The spiv films featured good wives, wives-going-bad, prostitutes, dance-hall hostesses, “good-time girls” out for a laugh and redeeming women. The degree to which a woman was involved with or profited from the spiv world tended to determine her position. Thus, women who fed their children with black market food obtained from a spiv were not as deeply implicated as were women enticed by the spiv’s offering of pretty things like stockings. Both of these types, of course, were more compromised than the redeeming woman, the wife or girlfriend who urged the spiv toward “goodness”, toward communal identification rather than the individualistic one.

If looked at in this way, both Alice and Connie are slightly compromised by their guilty knowledge of the activities of Ray’s gang. Connie, who abandons her life to help Ray and Stevie, presents a slightly more complex figure. She has urged Ray toward a different life throughout the film, provided a reluctant partner for him at gang social activities, and argued for his “old” life, his political engagement that he has abandoned. The real answer to understanding Connie and Alice lies in the films’ historical contexts.

Women in spiv films share an analytic framework with women in film noir: the postwar period. Spiv female characters are often seen as acting out a lack of reconciliation with postwar domesticity via criminality or association with criminality. Viv Chadder points out that spiv films deal with postwar anxieties: the inability of civil society to provide venues for heroic male actions and for women used to the freedom of wartime. Such a combination leads to women acting out their frustrations through associations and actions within the underworld.¹⁵

Face doesn’t work on that particular set of cultural problems. Neither Connie nor Alice fight a return to domesticity. We see Connie’s job; she is not being ousted from her job at the youth shelter by a culture that values female domesticity. Rather, she is losing her job due to a culture that devalues social programs. In addition to careers, the two women find outlets for their desires in politicized, communal venues offered by civil society. The men have deserted this arena for the nominally more profitable individual action, such as the robbery.

Despite the film's gendered construction of idealism/apathy, community/individualism, it's still the men's story that gets told. Ray's choices are the ones that structure the plot. This emphasis on the male story resonates with British concerns about masculinity in the 1990s. Claire Monk writes that:

"...In the 1990s...the impression grew of a society in which [...] masculinity - particularly young, skill-less, goal-less, working-class masculinity - was increasingly defined as a problem. As the 1990s progressed, male unemployment and social exclusion, and broader problems of masculinity, became the subtexts or themes of an increasing number of British films..."¹⁶

Face focuses on the male narrative as an emblematic one of choice. However, this film presents an exclusively white working-class masculinity as the "problematic" masculinity which is socially excluded. This use of whiteness masks the even greater exclusion/marginality of Blacks; it assigns the idea of social "loss" and exclusion to white males only. The white men in *Face* are part of the male population receiving the spotlight of social concern. The problems of white working-class males are marked as the problems of all working-class men. Like Ray, perhaps they are recuperable. Specific problems faced by Black males aren't mapped in this territory and concerns for their social "redemption" are overlooked.

The overwhelming whiteness of most British films constructs the term "British" as a group of white ethnicities and regions. Representations of non-specific whiteness allow the various peoples of the United Kingdom to read themselves, and to be perceived as a common culture. As Richard Dyer points out, non-particular whiteness is seen not as a constructed, racialized category, but as generalized, normative humanity.¹⁷ In British films, whiteness masks internal divisions, e.g. Scottish, Irish, English, and Welsh and helps construct a unified image of nation. This allows a common identification, an "us" to be formed, which excludes Black British people. Whiteness remains invisible as an analytic construct.

The close interrelationship between class and race in British society helps cement an exclusionary, white identity for Britain. Hanif Kureishi notes that the white working-class in Britain uses "the same vocabulary of contempt about Pakistanis [...] that their own British middle class used about them. And they weren't able to see the similarity."¹⁸

Although the film is set in the working class, a marked category within cultural identities, whiteness removes those marks, aligning the working class with other whites. This allows race to trump class and incorporate a story of working class exclusion into a discourse of hegemonic whiteness.

Whiteness also reaffirms traditional notions of the working class as a white class in which the concerns of men dominate. It is the white working-class male who receives the lion's share of attention on films about the working class. While there are a number of recent British films about working-class males, there are very few which feature working-class women. Kathy Burke's Valery, in *Nil By Mouth* (1997) forms a notable exception.

Face's Ending

This ending, the drive into the darkness, constructs a tension between hope and despair. The escape into "the North" gives the film a distinctly hopeful, perhaps even mythologizing spin. Ray has opted for friendship and reaffirmed his connections with Connie and Stevie. However lack of closure tempers this romanticized ending; they have nowhere to go and no money. Stevie's gunshot injury needs attention. The characters have not settled anything; they are not riding into a glorious sunset spreading over open territory; they're on the M1. The image of their small car driving away into the darkness, heading North to an uncertain future leaves the characters in an uneasy limbo.

Conclusion

Face was not released theatrically in the United States; however, in March 2000, it was released on video. Like any national cinema, Britain's films find themselves caught in the dilemma of localism v. internationalism. The films that export best are those that play up perceived "universal" themes and characters. So even though *The Full Monty* was set in the specific world of post-steel industry Lancashire, its tale of unemployed industrial workers echoed the plights of men in other countries. *Face* focuses so closely on the East End, on characters with heavy regional accents, and unlike *The Full Monty*, does not have a feel-good ending. These qualities could explain why it was not released theatrically in the United States.

However, like *The Full Monty*, *Face* was widely received in Britain as a film focusing on the shifting conditions of life for the working class man. What both *The Full Monty* and *Face* reveal are ways in which the loose construct of nation and representations of masculinity are reciprocal. As the ways in which the nation identifies itself through public discourse shift, so do masculine identities. What becomes permissible or even necessary to maintain a masculine identity alters as conditions of life/nation change.

Face reworks characteristics of the spiv film: specific working-class locales, a melodrama of choice, and its explicit emphasis on political and social conditions that configure the white male protagonist's choice. Through this cinematic heritage, *Face* articulates contemporary cultural problems in the definition of white working-class masculinity, and indicates a way in which the heritage film category can become more inclusive and useful as a tool for examining the relationships of nation, heritage, gender, race, and class.

13 Hill, "Allegorizing the Nation" 160.

14 Quart 20.

15 Viv Chadder, "The Higher Heel: Women and the Post-War British Crime Film," *British Crime Cinema*, ed. Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy (London: Routledge, 1999), 680.

16 Monk 174.

17 Richard Dyer, *White*. (London: Routledge, 1997): 6, 9, 28.

18 Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette and the Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 29.

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Distance

Hirokazu Kore-eda

by Susan Morrison

While the majority of films made in the last few decades seem to have adopted a sesame street/mtv approach to editing and pacing let alone plot, there still remain a few filmmakers who aim their works at a mature audience capable of savoring the intensity of the slow moment and the introspection demanded by such films. Hirokazu Kore-eda is one of these, his reputation solidly built on two films that attracted international attention; *Maborosi* (1995) and *After Life* (1998). The earlier film follows a young woman trying to come to terms with her husband's unexpected and seemingly unmotivated suicide. The later one continues the themes of memory and loss from an inverted perspective; that of the recently dead, who are asked at a way station to heaven to select the one moment from their lives that they would most like to remember and relive for eternity. The film's plot revolves around Mochizuki, a young worker at the way station who over the course of assisting an elderly gentleman find his 'favorite moment', discovers a memory/meaning of his own that enables him to move on to his afterlife.

This past September, Kore-eda sent to the Toronto International Film Festival his most recent film, *Distance* (2001). Unlike the other two, this one came with mixed to poor reviews. As with other major Asian directors whose work had screened earlier at Cannes (Hou Hsiao Hsien's *Millennium Mambo*, Tsai Ming-liang's *What Time is it There* and Shinji Aoyama's *Desert Moon*), the lack of a 'buzz' from the French festival was surprising. So many important and innovative directors; so little (good) being said about their most recent work. The Film Festival's press screening of *Distance* that I attended was perhaps two-thirds full, an auspicious beginning given the universal praise given to *After Life*. By the film's end the theatre had emptied out considerably, the press tending to vote with their feet. While the film is 2 hours 12 minutes, its length is not out of whack with the prevailing running times for major films, and Aoyama's *Eureka*¹ from last year's festival clocked in at over 3.5 hours; nevertheless, many of the negative reviews referred to it as too long and too unengaging... 'distanced', as it were.

For me, the experience of watching this film was revelatory. *Distance* requires a lot of concentration to detail; in fact it warrants multiple viewings as its layers unfold gradually with much work left to the viewer to piece together the parts. While the film unfolds as a linear narrative, it is interrupted by dangling shot inserts and flashbacks that aren't always clear as to

who they are about or what order they're occurring in, and at least two of these flashbacks are unreliable as they are contradicted by the plot's turn at the end. The ending especially requires a re-visiting of the narrative in order for the viewer to make sense of the actions of one of the main characters just as the film's four protagonists revisit the past in order to try to make sense out of the actions of their departed loved ones. Like the film's characters however, we are left at the end without concrete answers to our questions about motivation. There are no easy answers. Life isn't that simple, Kore-eda seems to be saying.

Distance opens with a tv news report marking the 3rd anniversary of a terrorist attack in which some members of a cult called the Arc of Truth poisoned Tokyo's water supply killing over 100 people and injuring thousands. However and unexpectedly, the film is about neither the victims nor the perpetrators of this terrible deed, who killed themselves afterwards and whose bodies were cremated by remaining cult members. It is concerned instead with four 'ordinary' individuals, each marked out by their familial connection to one of the perpetrators. We are introduced to Atsushi/Arata,² a young man who works in a flower shop, who has lost his sister; another young man, Masaru/Iseya Yusuke, a swimming instructor, whose older brother, a former medical student was involved; Kiyoka, a schoolteacher with a young child who has lost her husband, and Minoru/ Susumu Terajima, a middle-aged salaryman who has lost his wife. Every year, on the anniversary of the attack, these four meet to make a 'pilgrimage' to an isolated lake in a remote part of the countryside where the ashes of the cremated terrorists were scattered. On this occasion, another person appears at the site as they pay homage to their dead, Sakata/Tadanobu Asano, an Arc of Truth cult member who did not participate in the attack and thus survived. When by chance/plot device, their vehicle is stolen and they are thereby stranded in the middle of nowhere as night is about to fall, the four turn to Sakata (whose motorcycle has also disappeared) to guide them to the nearby cabin where the cult members lived out their last days prior to the attack. The night is spent in individual contemplation and reflection, as well as tentative inquiry as each one questions Sakata in his/her desire to find answers as to why their sister/brother/husband/wife chose to first abandon them and then commit such a terrible and tragic act together. Sakata's own story comes out in the discussion;



he's not just a witness of the events but as a cult member who chose to flee rather than participate, his revelations add further complexity to the narrative strands.

A major theme in *Distance* is that of 'family'. Each of the cult members has willfully left behind a real-life family to join a replacement 'family', the Arc of Truth, headed by a charismatic leader/father figure (who does not appear on screen but who plays a key role in the plot development). Each of the 4 protagonists has thus been confronted by their loved one's rejection of them, the most poignant being the married ones. Kiyoka's husband, once enlightened, tries unsuccessfully to convince her to leave the world behind and join up with him. She can't understand his conversion and subsequent indifference to her and their son. Minoru's wife not only leaves him for the Arc of Truth but for a new lover, Miyamura, who is also a cult member.

Distance is more than a mystery tale about the mourners trying to come to terms with their loss (why did the cult members reject their families? why did they commit the horrific act?). Near the end, it shifts unexpectedly into a mystery about one of the mourners; the character's family history becomes suspect and we are forced to reconsider his actions in the light of this revelation. Sequences we've watched depicting his interactions with several people become questionable as does the authenticity of family photographs we were led to believe were his. In addition, there is a brief insert near the end of the film, a shot of the interior of a hallway, the outside door just closing, with a woman's voiceover berating a man for leaving

his family behind. The scene is left dangling as to who it is about, the only clue being a flower arrangement on a table which utilizes a lily, the symbol of the Arc of Truth. The implication being that this is an *ur*-moment: it must be the cult leader's home and the moment represented thus is that of *his* abandonment of *his* family.

There is much visual pleasure in Kore-eda's film; beautiful static shots of the calm lake which frame and punctuate the narrative contrasting with rather jerky hand-held camera shooting for the rest of the film. The narrative pleasure in *Distance* is less accessible, especially as it is dependent on the viewer's ability/willingness to concentrate on putting together the pieces. But as in *Maborosi* and *After Life*, it is a deeply humanistic meditation on life and death that does not offer up neat answers, and in the end, is an extraordinarily rewarding experience.

1 *Distance* has been compared to *Eureka*, a film it would seem with as many detractors as supporters. Aoyama's film deals with a horrific act—a bus is hijacked and all but 3 people aboard are murdered by the lone hijacker—and its consequences for those who survived. *Eureka* is more conventional in its narrative trajectory that brings the traumatized survivors, the bus driver and 2 young children, together (as pseudo-family) as they seek some kind of respite/redemption from the horror they have witnessed.

2 Four of the five lead characters were in Kore-eda's previous films: Tadanobu Asano had a very small part in *Maborosi* as the husband who commits suicide. Arata played the lead in *After Life*; Iseya Yusuke had a small part as the punk youth who refuses to 'play the game' and choose a memory, thereby voluntarily relinquishing his ability to move on. He remains at the way station to assist—in this he's a replacement for Mochizuki/Arata who himself moves on by the film's end; and Susumu Terajima who plays one of the workers at the way station, a colleague of Mochizuki's.

THE INTIMATE SCREEN: Dogme and Beyond

by Diane Sippl

I'm Looking at You, Mary

The cinema is essentially supernatural. Everything is transformed.... The universe is on edge. The philosopher's light. The atmosphere is heavy with love. I am looking.¹

—Jean Epstein, 1921

But you should make films that look at your own way of life, your own way of seeing. Dogme can do that.²

—Mikael Olsen, tenured script consultant, Danish Film Institute, 2000

I'm Looking at You, Mary

"It feels like we've always been together, a natural couple," Mary tells the camera in a talking-head interview. "We share this place, the chores, our time—it's easy," she carries on about her boyfriend, Michal, as Minnie Ripperton chirps the song, "Loving You" in the opening credit sequence. Michal's brother is making a home movie to document their bliss. Life is treacle for the young couple in Lukasz Barczyk's recent film for Polish television. Mary gets pregnant, so they simply plan a wedding. But then neurologist Michal is assigned an overwhelming case. A celebrity actor in the middle of shooting a new film goes blind, and only because of some kind of psychic blockage. Michal cannot help him, and the man takes his own life. Soon enough we find Michal, in the midst of his wedding, locked away in the bathroom. When all others fail to draw him out, Mary pries her way in. The hand-held camera swerves and peers, gaping down at them in bride and groom clothes, collapsed next to the toilet on the bathroom floor, the guests banging on the door. "I want to give up my career. I have to give





Kira's Reason. A Love Story

it up, give it up. It's over," insists Michal. "But we're getting married... We're having a baby..." sighs Mary, in utter bewilderment. Michal slams his head into the mirror and shatters it. Mary holds him and asks the others to leave. The scene culminates the film. And what did the young writer-director tell the audience at the Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival when asked to explain his characters? "You have to look. You, me, all of us. We have to look around—at everything."

Twenty-six-year-old Barczyk, who studied Law and Administration before attending film school at Łódź, made *I'm Looking at You, Mary* in direct response to his own life experience and that of his friends. As a fly-on-the-wall spectator privy to Michal's emotional breakdown and Mary's dismay, I felt invasive, guilty, confused, saddened, useless—yet I was looking. For what? For precisely the honesty such a film could share. And while nothing struck me as supernatural or even spectacular, for those moments, all the universe was on edge, in another light, heavy with love—and I was transformed. I have not managed to see the film again, but I have not forgotten it, just as I have not since ceased to ask myself how Barczyk and his group created such a piercing intimacy for the big (and the little) screen.

For the rest of the festival I began to "look" more intensely, in service of this question, and I also looked back with the same scrutiny upon my favorite works from the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival last summer.

Kira's Reason...

It's the pesky filmic details that haunt me, I know, because in excess of information, they are superfluous to the logic of the

story but at the same time all that matters. They march themselves up there on the screen and bask in their demure power, teasing my independent investigation of what's happening to the characters and to me, indulging my resistance to an answer. And they don't go away....³

Oddly enough, the digital video camera eggs me on. This is not to mention a whole movement in filmmaking known, ironically, as Dogme 95 that has aimed to liberate theories and prac-

1 Richard Abel, ed., *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. 1: 1907-1921 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 246.

2 Richard Kelly, *The Name of this Book is Dogme 95* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 94. Olsen offers his version of the reason Dogme 95 arose: "... cinematic storytelling is completely dominated by American films. And (we) all try to replicate the American way. In Denmark, since World War Two, we seem to know much more about American society than we do our own. So, by making rules that compel you to tell stories in the here and now, it forces writers and directors to consider the reality of which they are a part" p. 94. He explains, "The idea that Danish films are doing well has political consequences, too. It gives Danish audiences new reasons to go to the cinema, or to go back to the cinema. And this year Danish films account for almost 30% of the home market, which is the highest it's been for years" p. 96. Richard Kelly's own take is: "Roughly a century after the invention of the cinema, the USA had succeeded in colonizing the global market in film. Fat, foolish, ruinously expensive, and ideologically hateful, Hollywood movies were the world's dominant cultural product. Even across continental Europe, where cinema had long been cradled as an imaginative art-form with its own heritage of great works, audiences seemed increasingly to disdain films made in their own language" p. 2. Thomas Vinterberg claims that for "simpler films with less equipment and a set of self-imposed restraints... (it) was easy. We asked ourselves what we hated most about film today and then we drew up a list banning it all. It took half an hour and it was a great laugh" p. 6. Camera operator Anthony Dod Mantle sees Dogme films as "an introduction to a discussion" p. 103-4. Many others see the rules (or the setting of their own rules and limitations) as a "way to gain creativity through self-imposition" p. 80. Lone Scherfig sees Dogme as "an offer to work as freely as I ought to... a gift rather than a set of commandments" p. 126. Peter Aalbaek Jensen at Zentropa claims Dogme to be "a political movement... It's just to kick ass in a sloppy business" p. 89. All of these references and descriptions reinforce the purposes of both the International Film Festival, Mannheim-Heidelberg and the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival, reviewed through the selections here.

tices of representation by allowing for the emergence of “precise truths” in much the same way that photography began by seeking “objective reproductions.” The “dogme” consists of ten rigid commandments laid down for capturing reality.⁴ The irony consists in the fact that, arguably, the most contagiously inspiring result of these rules is (as was the case with photography) the subversion of their purpose and the achievement of its opposite: “a mute ambiguity inviting subjective reverie.”⁵

Ole Christian Madsen put it right in his title: *Kira's Reason. A Love Story*. The two nominative phrases appear to contradict each other—a tale of the head and a tale of the heart, but this is quite the opposite of canceling each other out: it's the mystery *between* the two that I can't shake off, nor do I want to. In the Dogme spirit (and to the letter of its rules) Madsen looks at his own life and his own way of seeing. While other Danish Dogme films have tended to hinge on ensemble work, he sees a focus on only two people to be the ultimate Dogme idea. With this added individual rule, he also decided to write his feature-length script with only 70 scenes (as opposed to the usual 120) but allowed himself to shoot 120 hours of material, opening each scene with improvisations and gaining intensity from there.

As the film lingers for me I recall that tempo meant nothing and rhythm everything. The to-and-fro movement between mind and spirit, will and wish, is what made me dizzy ever more so than the hand-held camera. In that delirium I was right there with Kira, off-kilter in the public swimming pool with my children, dead-sure of my husband's affair with my sister, all-knowing that my forgiveness was the only way things might ever get right with us again. How to reconcile my knowledge with my feelings?

“A strong love had to be the foundation for my storytelling,” Madsen affirms, “a strong love between the two, and a strong love of the idea of people staying together. I was recently divorced myself, and I wanted to explore the feeling of waking up one morning, realizing that you have become a problem for the ones you love, that you are no longer the gift or the pleasure you used to be... no, you are a problem, maybe you are *the* problem....”⁶ Madsen gave Kira a manic disorder so as to grapple with his idea, and the result is a film about longing.

Kira strives to play the role of the wife and mother that she is, and desperately seeks to refrain from sexual escapades with strangers and excesses with her children. But even after hospitalization, she lacks the self-control she so desires. As she loses touch with her life, she and her husband Mads fight for their love. And through their losing battle, we grow closer to them and further from any clear answer to their dilemma. What we are left with (as in the case of Mary and Michal in Poland) is a gratifying sense of trust—in the filmmaker's bravery of intuition that matches and meshes with the characters' elusive persistence, and in the obstinacy of the accidental but contingent details the camera encompasses, the idiosyncratic expression of a face, a voice, that is true to the moment and will never be the same again.

Enter Only During Applause (or a solar eclipse)

While *Kira's Reason...* feels like one of the most loving films

you have ever seen, *Strass* looks like one of the most cynical—that is, until you catch yourself thinking about it, which takes awhile, because in *Strass* the rapid-fire tempo of its ruthless, Dogme-turned-chic documentary style is part of the cynicism. Our thinking happens in stages and layers, and in a variety of ways the joke's on us. “This movie is pure fiction. Any resemblance to anyone is purely accidental, and purely so....” is an ambiguous disclaimer printed on the screen before the film opens.

Vincent Lannoo's *Strass* is reminiscent of Lars Von Trier's *The Idiots* because it depicts experiments in acting and, like *The Idiots*, is itself an experiment. If Von Trier was shoring up “a generation of people who are spoilt, who believe they can act out any role they care to,”⁷ then *Strass* takes the matter to its source, an experimental course in a drama school where Professor Pierre Radowsky (the raucously funny Pierre Lekeux, who also produced the film) thinks he can pull any self-serving stunt he wants to. These include auditioning women by sex appeal and casting them by their willing seduction as well as expelling male students who become aroused by the command sexual improvisations of the mentor via sensual female students. To cover himself when necessary, Professor Radowsky goes so far as to invent a sordid family history for himself, relating his mother's violent fate and its tragic consequences to one of his unmanageable students. The lurid details are intriguing: what else might explain the man's abominable ego and abuses of power, all in the name of his revolutionary method, “the open pedagogy”? His reputation brings a small film crew to the school to document his method.

Sooner than later, Radowsky's classroom rape of a coed who won't be seduced makes the TV news because our documentarians' slipshod but sure-fire camera work catches the action (and others, against closed doors, but through the keyhole, so to speak), so a puffed-up celebrity alumnus is recruited to offset the scandal in the public eye. But from behind the scenes comes the real revelation: the documentary crew (headed by Lannoo playing the cameraman) catches the professor “up-close and personal” with his mother, not at all violently murdered but alive and well and profoundly disgusted with her son. She lords it over the egomaniac in a fully unexpected and provocative scene, one as surprising as the return of the coed rape “victim” to the school when she retracts her allegation once her fees are offset.

Just as moments earlier we were enthralled by Radowsky's Jack-the Ripper identity story, titillated by the sex improvisation instruction, and wide-eyed at the potential striptease the chosen female student would provide for the commanding professor-on-the-prowl, we are puzzled but baited when Radowsky, finally “busted” and spat upon while the whole ensemble treks out to view the solar eclipse, accuses Lannoo, as the documentary director, of exploiting sensation for money. In a prior scene during an ad-hoc audition when Radowsky and his snide board of male cronies enjoyed a hoarse belly-laugh at themselves during the try-outs of woman after woman reading tragic lines, we ultimately laughed *with* the infectious scoundrels—as well as *at* them—and which is worse? We were voyeurs, caught in the act; aren't we always, at least in watch-

ing movies? But this was a documentary—oops, it wasn't, we recall being told. Does it matter? These are the questions that dog us in *Strass*, which feels more like *stress*, or at least the sweaty palms of our covert conspiracy.

"Keep your eyes and ears wide open, because you're about to face the naked truth of a theater school" the Principal told us as he ushered in the crew. But as subjects of such a documentary, which exposes the students' double vulnerability—to the driving intensity of their rehearsals and also to the relentless invasion of their privacy behind the scenes—the actors feel as if they're in a fiction film. And aren't they? As Freud saw, "the joke is a denial that also functions as a means of access, a channel capable of being confronted directly."⁸ Like *The Idiots*, *Strass* as a whole is a "theory joke" that hinges on intimacy.

Richard Kelly describes Von Trier in making *The Idiots* as gathering his troupe about him to explain the fantastic notions that begat the script: "one can feel his desire to denude the filmmaking process, to challenge himself, to build a company and work through his ideas, in an intimate environment of work and play akin to theatre.... (But Von Trier) is a director unaccustomed to the 'touchy-feely', living-in-each-others'-pockets way of working that flourishes in theatre."⁹ Whether Lannoo and Lekeux are also uncomfortable with this way of working is not disclosed to us, but in making *Strass* they use Dogme-style documentation to blast illusion and Dogme-style dramatization to ridicule knowledge by "facts"; they succeed precisely by allowing their protagonists to fall flat on their faces. No one escapes mockery in *Strass*, which takes pot-shots at Von Trier as well when the students are required to stand in silent worship before a new photo portrait of their internationally renown guru, a parody of the ritualistic hymns the Brotherhood sings mornings at Zentropa Studios to this date.¹⁰

The sassy and punchy *Strass* (all puns intended with Lee Strassberg and Method Acting) is not only Lannoo's first feature but also the first Belgian Dogme film among the twenty produced so far worldwide. For its corrosive humor and deployment of perverse "limit situations," the film draws from

3 In his fascinating *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Robert B. Ray proposes, "A heurctic film studies might begin where *photogenie*, third meanings, and fetishism intersect: with the cinematic detail whose insistent appeal eludes precise explanation. Barthes maintained that third meanings, while resisting obvious connotations, compel an 'interrogative reading'." p.13.

4 See Richard Kelly, *The Name of this Book is Dogme 95*. The "dogme" itself is more ambiguous than one might think. The Dogme Manifesto includes ten "commandments" and a set of "pledges" made by the founders, four Danish "Brothers," Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Kristian Levring, and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen (originally Anne Wivel was included as well). Kelly lists the Rules on pp. 8-10 (roughly summarized here): location shooting with no extraneous props or sets, source music and sound only, a hand-held camera at all times, color stock and natural lighting, no superficial action (including murders or weapons), stories that take place in the here and now and outside of genres, Academy 35mm film format, and no director credit.

5 Ray, p. 20.

6 Ole Christian Madsen, interview with this author, December 11, 2001.

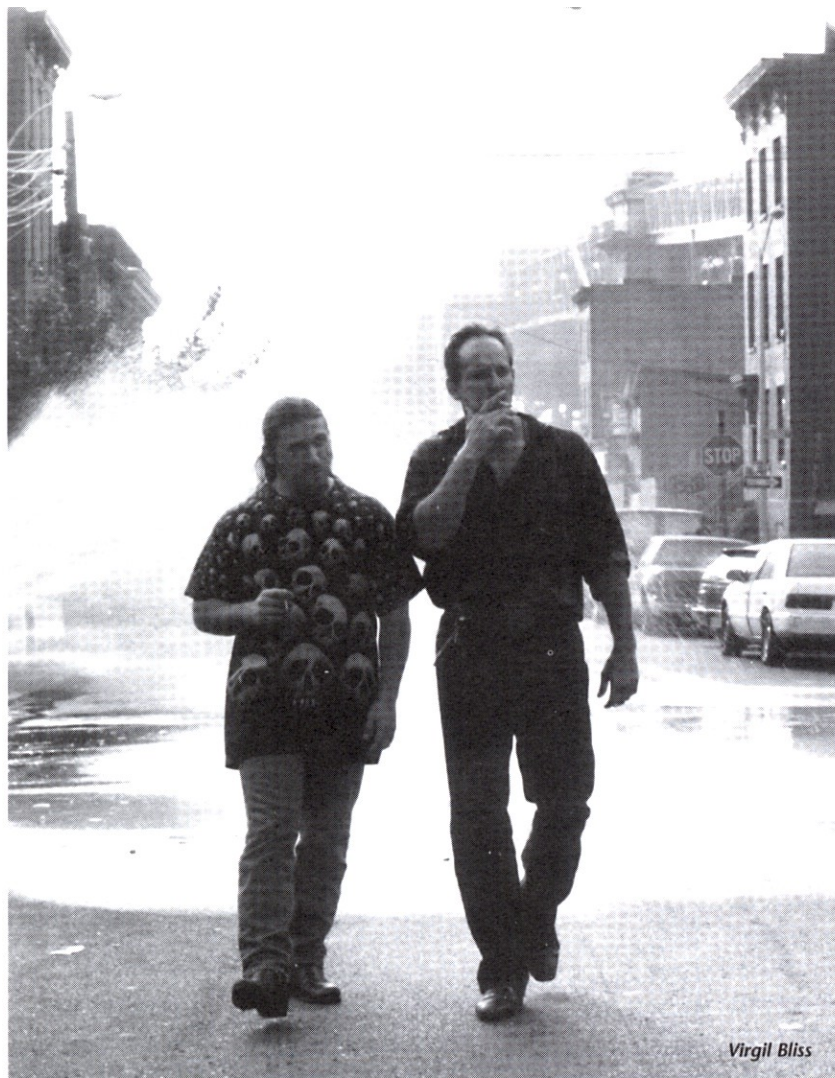
7 Mikael Olsen, Danish Film Institute, in Kelly, p. 94.

8 Ray, p. 49.

9 Kelly, p. 59-60.

10 This is according to the January, 2002 eye-witness account of Jim Koenig, founder and director of the Scandinavian Film Festival, Los Angeles, which last year showcased Dogme founder Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *Mifune* and this year is offering *Italian for Beginners* by Lone Scherfig, the first practicing Dogme Sister, and *Von Trier's 100 Eyes* by Danish documentary filmmaker Katia Forbert Petersen.



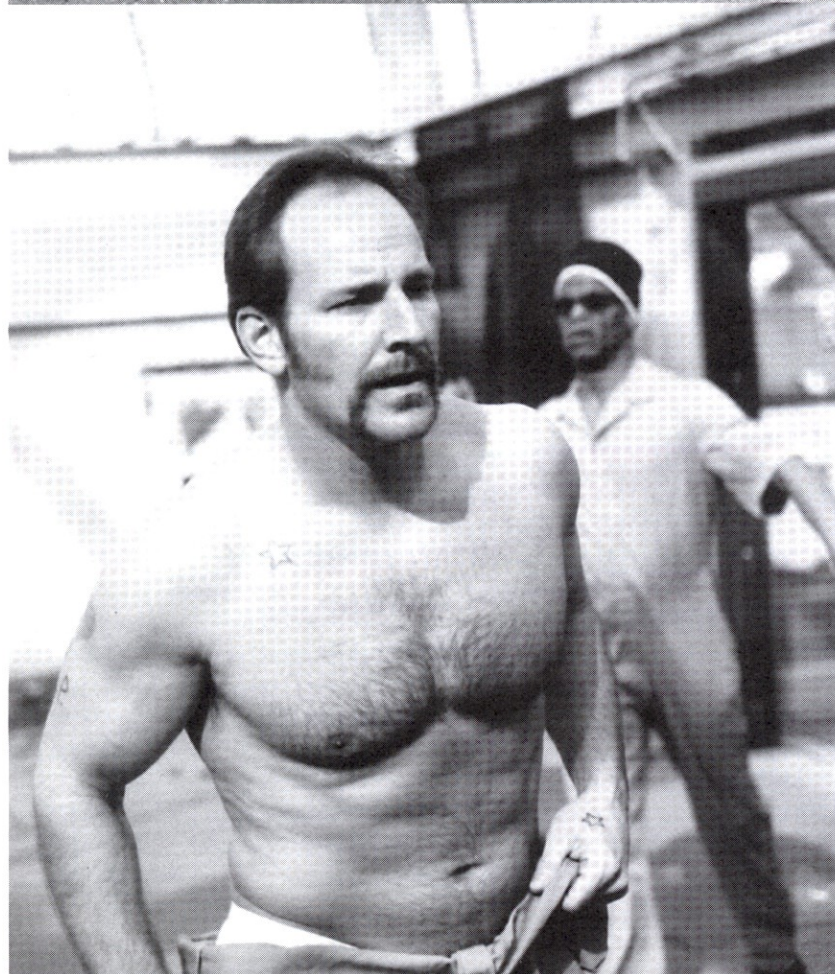


Artaud's Theater of Cruelty. Not only do the students use the documentary crew as mediators and arbitrators protecting them from Radowsky all the while they feign and pose and pull pranks to serve their own rivalries, but we ourselves are happily carried away by the fictional reportage to imagine the real atrocities of acting schools.

Strass is at once a documentary critique of the small power of small people who run large institutions and a theatrical send-up of TV journalism. After all, the documentary crew, happy to see Radowsky "put his foot (or something else) in it," runs to the TV network to sell the hot tapes. Now even these could be promotional, but who is manipulating whom? Finally, via the Dogme-style documentary within the actual Dogme fiction film, *Strass* is altogether an exercise interrogating Dogme itself—its lapses, its pretensions, its shenanigans, its ultimate integrity. We are accustomed to making the demand that cinema announce itself as fiction or fact, and in all good conscience and allegiance to the Dogme creed, *Strass* asks us *why*. Revolutionary pedagogy "the Radowsky way" offers us the work of on-going imagination. If his Open Door Teaching Method, designed to establish a true dialogue by breaking down notions of power and hierarchy, inevitably strips the professor bare of his hypocrisy, it ushers us into the vital opportunity of uninhibited curiosity.

With Friends Like These...

"Way up in Maine," New Yorker Joe Maggio told a Mannheim audience, "an old storyteller with a strange accent and an odd sense of humor used to relate the adventures of the dirtiest man around. For example, in winter, the steam from the man's bed sheets smelled like it came from a manure heap. One story told the way the man died: fishing for lobsters, he fell into the water, and although he was a good swimmer, he was so dirty that the dirt just dragged him down." That man was called Virgil Bliss, and Maggio found him the perfect metaphor for his own little tale of redemption and loss. I say "little" only because from its inception, *Virgil Bliss* was imagined and executed as a digital video project. It tells a simple story that rides almost entirely on three characters—two parolees and a neighborhood streetwalker. The action takes place on the streets of Brooklyn, but not in the usual form of cruises and chases, crimes, raids, and busts. It's the lonely, sad steps from the prison to the half-way house, from the lavatory fist fight to the toilets Virgil cleans for his first legal job, that set



the pace in the natural locales of this all-too-real "DV folklore." In its eloquence, Maggio's legend of the failed hero reads like the poor man's classic tragedy. So finely etched is the triad of lovers/adversaries and so genuine is their salty dialogue that the small, private truths deceive us, playing on our righteousness and creeping into our hearts: *their* "dirt" could be anyone's, and this is the fear that binds. Who has not tried to turn a life around at a moment in time? This is the question the story poses: can you change someone else's life if you can't change your own?

In the first hour of Virgil's parole, his roommate in the half-way house, Manny, offers whiskey, drugs, a knife, porn magazines, and his husky yearning to wrestle with Virgil—every way possible of breaking the house rules. Soon enough he introduces Virgil to the neighborhood professional, Ruby, as his best bet for being with a woman. Manny sticks to Virgil like water to a duck's back, as does Virgil to Ruby, when she will let him. "You reckon me and you is friends?" Manny tugs at Virgil after he just clobbered Manny in the street for insulting Ruby. And within a day or two, Ruby, strung out on her couch as Virgil leaves to keep his curfew, begs in her delirium, "Are you my friend? Can I trust you?" And for Virgil's part, "Say you love me," he whispers in Ruby's ear as he steals a dance when she's flirting with Manny. With friends like these, who needs enemies... the adage goes, fleshed out with Manny's macho pride and line-up of "real" jobs for Virgil, Ruby's pimp at Virgil's throat, and Virgil himself, a career thief with a strong arm and a violent temper. The drama is so chock-full of conflict we're convinced the characters can never win but for Virgil, so clear, adamant, steadfast and stubborn that even the treacherous path he chooses—to a straight future with a crack addict prostitute—seems plausible. His Jesus chain (Virgil calls it his "good luck charm" and his "last companion") tells us he wants to believe in something—in someone, himself.

"How low can a character go before the audience turns against him or her?" Maggio asked himself in writing the script. He recalled all the really nasty people he'd ever known and what redeemed them in his eyes. "Love, or rather the need to love, the need for human closeness, is one of those redeeming forces."¹¹

It's the quiet, somber way in which Virgil searches for practical everyday solutions that is cathartic here. Virgil cries and Virgil runs, and there is a down-to-the-bone intimacy in seeing such childlike behavior in a man so staunch in his mission and so virile in his body and the way he carries it. When Manny first delivers him to Ruby for service on the street, he runs pell-mell around the corner before she even gets his zipper down, realizing how exposed he feels and how at-odds such behavior is with his need for love. To then see him wrestle on the asphalt with Manny when he calls Virgil a "fag" and a "virgin" is to discover Manny's own ploy for intimacy and perhaps Virgil's only mode of physical contact before knowing Ruby. In fact when Virgil turns away from his small circle at the parole counseling session and casts his gaze to the floor to weep, it's not the first shot, a close-up, that stuns so much as the next, a long shot of him, far across an all but empty room, alone even with his peers, lost and overwhelmed when the counselor con-

fronts him with turning a man into a vegetable for fifty dollars.

With his southern twang Virgil is wryly referred to as "Jethro," "Tex," "Country Boy," "Redneck," and "Cowboy," and Greta Gaines' bluesy non-diegetic songs and Clint Jordan's own guitar score help to further isolate Virgil from the physical turf of Brooklyn. In most other ways, the film couldn't serve as a better illustration of Dogme American-style. In fact Dogme's 1998 *Celebration* directly inspired Joe Maggio to put together his own digital video feature. "I don't give a damn," says Maggio, "about Dogme 95 with their 'Vows of Chastity' and official Dogme certificates. What Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg proved was that digital technology was finally at a level where it was possible to make a compelling, commercially viable feature film without having to mortgage your life away."¹² With all his experience as a sound technician, a screenwriter, and a journalist interviewing independents such as John Sayles, Hal Hartley, Jonas Mekas, Mike Leigh, and the Dogme tyrant himself, Lars von Trier, it was the directing of actors that Maggio took on as his main challenge in creating *Virgil Bliss*. The DV aesthetic, with its maneuverability of the camera, fast shooting pace, and capacity for natural lighting would lend itself to a non-intrusive means of catching the integrity of the performance.

At first the actors' workshop Maggio directed for two years was a tool enabling him to write as he videotaped and then transcribed the characters and scenes the actors improvised. But there he met Clint Jordan and Kirsten Russell, actors who helped him generate the ensemble way of working they so admired in John Cassavetes.¹³ When they were cast as Virgil and Ruby, three months of intensive rehearsals prepared them for a ten-day shoot with a crew of three. At friends' apartments, the local YMCA, the prison, the half-way house—the actual sites we see with no touch-ups and no lights, the actors were required to be "on" for extended, unbroken stretches of time, well beyond even the hours of live theater. With flexibility in shutter speeds and in-camera effects, the Mini-DV camera was able to capture the characters in images that tended to break up and dissolve as their lives were coming apart, the low-light conditions thus contributing to the narrative. Such a technique begs a viewing habit that participates in the sensuality of the text; it draws a subconscious reading of the image wherein looking *is feeling*, a way of seeing that defies the conventional method of information retrieval from plot, action, and dialogue. To look at *Virgil Bliss* is to look in a way "that focuses less narrowly and instead roams over the frame, sensitive to its textures and surfaces"—a way of looking akin to touching.¹⁴

A small budget, a small crew, and a small cast, but especially a small camera, spelled intimacy for Joe Maggio, which is exactly what he was seeking. Anthony Dod Mantle, who shot Vinterberg's *Celebration* with a Sony PC&E, has spoken of agility, mobility, and accessibility as comprising the "emotional movement" of small cameras in situations in which "you have to move before your brain really registers what you're doing."¹⁵ Surely the prolonged intensity of the acting performance, the texture of light fading in the frame, and the "emotional movement" of the camera all add to the depths of intimacy Joe

Maggio so aptly achieves in *Virgil Bliss*, not only his first feature but the first work in digital video format to be allowed entry into the competition at the International Film Festival, Mannheim-Heidelberg. Unlike the Dogme films, it will not be transferred to 35 mm but will be released theatrically in April, 2002 to be shown on digital projectors, helping to set a precedent of its own.

Violet Perfume (nobody hears you)

Last summer I finally became acquainted with Maryse Sistach when her film was honored as the closing night choice for the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival. She told me she came to the cinema from anthropology: feeling that no one knew what an anthropologist was, she chose to make documentaries. Once she entered film school she fell in love with pictures. *Violet Perfume...*, her fifth feature, is a radiant docudrama based in part on how its young actors see their world.

Fifteen years ago Sistach read a tiny article in the newspaper about two teenage girls fighting over a bottle of perfume. In the last few years, with those same newspapers increasingly reporting cases of kidnapping, sexual violence, and killing of adolescent girls in Mexico, she felt it was urgent to speak about the topic. So after her husband, fellow filmmaker José Buil, wrote a script from the little story, she set out to portray these teenage girls in Mexico City. In order to deepen her understanding of their lives, she conducted a theater workshop in a poor neighborhood in which any of the youths could participate and share their improvisations of other true stories about violence among teens. From this workshop she cast all of the teen "actors" in the film, but more important, it was a way for her to be in contact with them, to learn how they feel, behave, and express themselves. The look and sound of the film were largely a result of the workshop, which also prompted adjustments in the dialogue and the sensibility of the film, its way of seeing and feeling the problems of the characters.

"They had big, big problems, and they had to solve them by themselves," notes Sistach. "There was a huge lack of communication with their parents, and some weren't even living with their families. Many came from a very difficult economic situation, and some of the teens were working—as street vendors, drug dealers, in the informal sector. The school didn't give them any capacity to solve their problems, either, and they felt abandoned."¹⁶ Sistach set out with as mobile a camera as possible, shooting in Super 16, to achieve a documentary tone in the film.

"I decided that the camera should move as if it were Yessica breathing, because her state of mind would change very much under the circumstances that touched her. We wanted the sound to be part of the chorus of the city, so we tried to find musicians who were really young to play these sounds. We wanted to make a tele-documentary, and to fit the aesthetics to the purpose and the subject matter."

While the method of research, working with the subjects, and shooting the film may lend it a documentary tone as it achieves authentic and responsible representation, the key to the film's ethics is the power of its artistic persuasion. *Violet Perfume...* doesn't feel like a documentary, organic and

poignantly convincing as it is on every front. I experienced the film as a series of vibrantly dramatic secrets and disclosures rarely expressed in words but more often in wounds and bruises, choked up tears, and embraces. There are the ruses and sudden escapes as even best friends violate each other. In this way the film is theatrical. Much of the time the natural colors and textures of the neighborhood buildings and landscape are actually scintillating. The source of the tragic violence is economic, but also, as if reacting to Mexico's historic cinematic obsession with the "castigated woman" (from *Santa* to *María Candelaria* and well beyond), the film reveals the early betrayals, closed ears, defensive scapegoating, and hypocrisy (all on the part of others) that initiate a girl into a personal economy of prostitution. Yet as I viewed the film, an explanation of Yessica's petty crimes and ultimate loss was never at issue. Always at the forefront were the feelings that gave rise to them.

Violet Perfume ... makes ample use of the twin cornerstones of theatrical cinema, voyeurism and fetishism, in ways that are subtly subversive of storytelling conventions. Like a scent on a breeze, the film serves up impressions of emotional states more than links in a narrative we decipher with suspense. Yessica, a gangly girl who is still developing awkwardly, romps down the streets pigeon-toed and knock-kneed; in close-ups she appears almost cross-eyed. In contrast to the more petite and traditionally feminine Miriam, Yessica doesn't wear her clothes; they are simply thrown over her body. Her long (and strong) arm is forever hanging around Miriam's neck as they trudge along to school, to the open market, to the do-it-yourself photo booths. Why is it, my question lingers, that I have felt so complicit with their escapades—as if I were in the middle of their tortuous embrace all along?

Maybe it's because the two-shots, abundant as they are of the girlfriends who find refuge in each other, are most interesting when the girls sit face-to-face with a distance between them bridged only by their extended legs. Seated on Miriam's couch this way with a bowl of fruit balanced in the middle, the camera pans back and forth as they contrast the reactions of their mothers to Yessica's abuse by her step-brother. The sequence echoes an earlier scene with them perched at opposite ends of Miriam's bath tub as they precariously coddle a bubble the size of a melon. There the camera angle is from the ceiling watching them frolic as they enjoy with each other what neither of them indulges in alone. It's not sex, but play. Both of them without fathers, their mothers demand so much of their attention—Yessica's from afar by putting her to work babysitting and doing the take-in laundry, and Miriam's up-close by begging foot massages, vanity table confidences, and walks to school—that the girls' shared leisure seems taboo, let alone their voluptuous face-painting, dancing for each other, and sprees with boys.

The sizzling rainbow colors of the interior and exterior locations, the non-diegetic orchestral score and the dynamic rock songs lend themselves to the stylized covert rituals inherent in the girls' everyday life. And then there are the brazen and involuntary gestures—Yessica grabbing up a lock of Miriam's long hair to take in its fragrance a minute after she first meets her in class, or much later, after she has just implicated Miriam

in her own sudden urge to shoplift, Yessica's crouching to pee right through her jeans in between crates of fruit at the *mercado central*. By this time such a shot is stripped of all the conventional scatological erotica, for this is the living proof that in fact Yessica is the bed-wetter her pimping step-brother calls her. It's excruciating to see her, already in flight from her crime, wiping off her ankles with her soiled socks, sobbing, now even without her only friend. But it's still more painful to see her, a day or so later and further abused, further incriminated, taking flight this time to Miriam's empty bed, where she crawls under the covers and is presumed by Miriam's mother to be her own daughter. Worried sick about Miriam, the woman caresses the girl in the bed as if her life depended on it, not knowing, as we do, that the recipient of her affection is her true nemesis.

Here Yessica's attempt at retrieval (of Miriam) and recovery (of parenting) is uncanny; it places another layer of value, not to mention tragic irony, upon the friendship between the two girls as a last outpost for Yessica's survival. And yet again one last time, this physical separation of the girls emphasizes their intimacy. When Yessica smiles directly at the camera from Miriam's pillow, I feel like a voyeur in the bedroom, cornered by her pathetic heart. By virtue of sensuous and indelible impressions, Maryse Sistach has wooed me to the marvelous. That is, by restricting my field of vision so as to intensify the girls' self-expression, Sistach has endowed the two friends with a poetic value that I was not yet ready to see. The characters have modeled the fetishist's gaze throughout the film, so that I might adapt it, finding painful pleasure in the beauty of their intimacy.

This Man Cries

I will close by savoring the feature film debut of Martín Rodríguez, which stunned me at both the Mannheim-Heidelberg and the Los Angeles Latino festivals in 2000 and has not escaped me since. *Somewhere in the Night* tiptoes into the emotional terrain of *machismo* like waves rolling over a silky beach, glowing as they catch the moonlight and creeping up further as the tide closes in. The film's impressionistic narrative rises not with action but with feelings that spill from the characters by default. The events, but for one, happen earlier or off-screen. Thirty-something Diego mourns the break-up of his marriage in the long

11 Joe Maggio, press kit for *Virgil Bliss*, 2001.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Cassavetes, whom everyone knows and admits employed many of Dogme's rules long before the Brotherhood declared them and before any DV camera existed, has deeply inspired not only Dogme 95 but in particular Ole Christian Madsen, whose *Kira's Reason: A Love Story* is extremely reminiscent of *A Woman Under the Influence* and *Opening Night*.

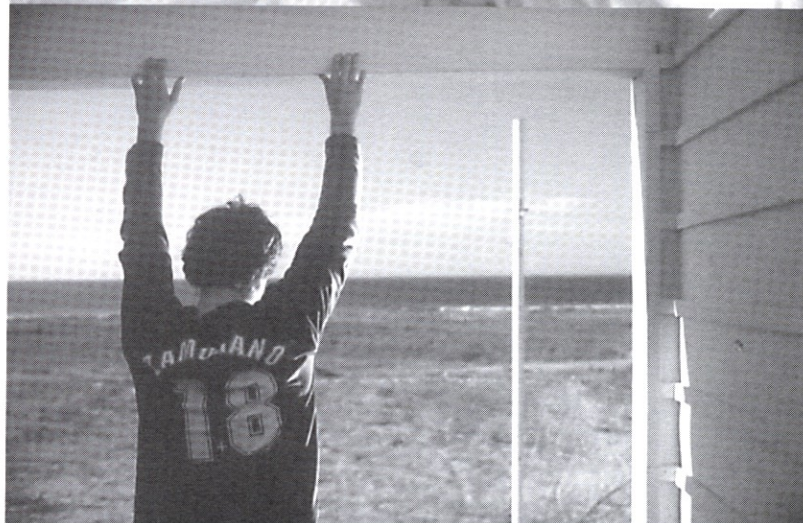
14 Ray, p. 28.

15 Kelly, pp. 100-101.

16 Maryse Sistach, interview with this author, Hollywood, August 2001.



Somewhere in the Night



shadow of his parents' divorce, which has left him as estranged from his brother Simón as from his father. Simón works for his father in the north of Chile and although younger, appears to be more versed in his father's manly ways than the relatively effete Diego and, most likely, than the third brother Gabriel, who has been missing for two years.

The fragments of this broken family comprise an affective bricolage with flickering scenarios. So fragile are the young men's feelings that the film eases into being with slow pans and quiet zooms. Often the camera does not dare to move in, and ponders the motions and gestures from a static and deferential distance. In fact close-ups are rare in this intimate odyssey, as if to respect the characters who are inadvertently baring their souls. It's from across the street that we notice Diego pulling up at a public phone booth to make an anonymous call to an escort service. Panoramic long shots isolate first Diego and then Simón in their aching solitude. And just as the camera lingers in a shot that takes its time, the frame complicates the image by requiring us to observe through a window, a mirror, or multiple interior frames, drawing our contemplative gaze as the brothers themselves reflect on their lives.

Much as *Somewhere in the Night* becomes a road film of emotional processing as the sons travel north to address their father's sudden death, it is also a subjective interrogation of the *machismo* that has turned the brothers against each other and themselves. It's uncanny to see them compete for their duties in dealing with the corpse through a pinball game of "mini-soccer," or test each other's paternal legacies as they compare lessons in shaving. Which one "scores" more and why is a question that wanes before the increasingly pressing concern of who is going to need to take care of whose vulnerable sensibility.

Along the road tension flares up whenever Diego feels that Simón lacks the discipline or reverence to leave others out of their picture—a pretty cashier at the travel shop on the highway, or a congenial New Age backpacker they meet at a truck stop diner. Like his womanizing father, Simón can't resist a chance for a sexual conquest or at least a slap on the back with a new buddy. He thrusts a hitchhiker upon Diego in his state of grieving. But when Diego then takes up with the sister of their deceased dad's last girlfriend, Simón shies away. The tide turns, and it is now Simón whose automatic pilot goes out. Diego comes to see his little brother's extroversion as dependency, a need for contact, a defense against being left behind. For example, Simón trades his sweater for his new friend's soccer shirt when they part, and he dons his dad's pullover at the beach house, after he lies down in his dad's unmade bed to "sniff out" his last living moments, only to end up in a fetal position. Gradually the story's triads shore up a new dyad—two brothers who, in discovering the imposing presence of their dead father, find each other in the tender power of mourning.

This first feature not only for Rodríguez but also for his exceptional actors Pancho López (Diego) and Luciano Cruz-Coke (Simón) shares the sensitive dialogue of admired novelist and screenwriter Alberto Fuguet. "Women are different from us—they can't be alone..." boasts Simón. "...We're like wine—we need to be on our own to mature." And Diego retorts, "Shut up. You don't know what you're talking

about." "Neither do you!" laughs Simón.

After his formal education in cinema, Rodríguez took a screenwriting workshop for a year with Antonio Skármeta and then one in the directing of actors with Judith Weston in Maine. For *Somewhere in the Night* he knew he wanted "a smooth cadence that followed the emotions of each scene in a small film about unsaid affections."¹⁷ An aficionado of jazz artists such as Keith Jarrett, Rodríguez wrote the lyrics to the closing song, "Three Brothers." A pensive piano and sax lead the score throughout, complementing the spontaneity of the narrative and the pristine beauty of Chile's desert coast. Edward Hopper's paintings and their sense of loneliness inspired the presentation of the images. "Chilean films used to look quite different from my film," Rodríguez reflects. "I don't know if I belong to a certain trend, but I can say that I belong to the family of directors for whom human relationships are more important than pure action. The characters and their troubles, moments of happiness, challenges and decisions are my concern." With his palette of clear hues and modulated tones, Martín Rodríguez creates a masculinity of profound understanding.

Against a Conclusion...

Exposition. Action. Resolution. How superfluous they are to the intimate screens of the handful of works I am presenting here. Robert Ray has observed, "movies are often experienced... as intermittent intensities (a face, a landscape, the fall of light across a room) that break free from the sometimes indifferent narratives that contain them."¹⁸ He goes on to argue that Lumière's efforts to record real life were more open to a lyrical, contemplative, and rapturously ambiguous exchange than Méliès' "magical" narrative adventures. Surrealistic or impressionistic modes of experiencing life could be achieved through the moving image a century ago. And today, to my delight, it is the Dogme movement, among other sources, that insists on such a dream world "in order to discover the features of the real world we think we inhabit."¹⁹

The organic processes used in creating the works I discuss here stimulate ways of looking as ways of touching and feeling. Whether out-of-control and in-your-face or quietly meditative, scathingly satirical or tragically ironic, gritty or pristine, Dogme-sensitive or Dogme-rebellious, the stories I share above are powerful, but they alone are not what move me so much as the incredible discipline of labor and aesthetics practiced by the artists involved. It's a discipline that frees as it challenges. It commands responsibility to the medium as well as to the audience, which in turn nourishes a powerful trust—in the writer, the director, the actor, the camera operator, the spectator, in the phenomenal truths of our everyday life. Without this trust, what intimacy is there to offer and to discover?

¹⁷ Martín Rodríguez, interview with this author, December 7, 2001.

¹⁸ Ray, p. 4.

¹⁹ Feyerabend in Ray, p. 47.

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**Disclosure of the Everyday:
Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film**
By Andrew Klevan
Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 2000

Aptly enough, it is in his entry on Douglas Sirk that David Thomson waxes poetic on the connection between the descriptive qualities of melodrama and the experience of cinema. From his *Biographical Dictionary of Film* (1994) he writes:

BOOK REVIEW

Cinema's Recounting of the Ordinary

by Jeffrey Crouse

Cinema—as an entertainment, an art form, an academic topic, or an institution—is addicted to melodrama. What greater contrast of chiaroscuro is there between burning screen and darkened audience? ... What medium is so dependent on sensation, with the screen so much larger than life and the constant threat that in a fraction of a second the image we are watching can change so unimaginably? And what are the abiding themes of cinema but glamour, sexuality, fear, horror, danger, violence, suspense, averted danger, true love, self-sacrifice, happy endings, and the wholesale realization of those hopes and anxieties that we are too shy to talk about in daylight? Why is it dark in cinemas? So that the compulsive force of our involvement may be hidden.

Strange though it might seem for a scholar focused on films committed to the ordinary, Andrew Klevan would only concur with Thomson. But by following Stanley Cavell's premise that film's characteristic melodramatic mode reflects



Loves of a Blonde



modern society's struggle with the burden of skepticism, he is able in *Disclosure of the Everyday* to launch into a horizon-setting analysis of film style by exploring cinema's capacities for the undramatic.

The line of skepticism in Western metaphysics, beginning with Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) and involving major interventions from Kant, Emerson and Thoreau, Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Cavell himself, posits the condition of a subjectivity made isolated after having been stripped of the Eternal Verities once supplied by religion and state ideologies. Falling back on nothing but its own existence, the self frantically seeks proofs of connection in which to feel and understand the world. (To make matters more desperate even the self's existence is doubted.) A question like "How can I make myself known to another?" acquires vital meaning, for example, in the conversation of marriage. Without common objective points outside of the self the basis for matrimony, at the very least, becomes deeply problematic.

Yet rather than avoiding the gap that exists between the self and the world, Cavell builds on Thoreau's notion of "neighboring the world." Shunning the attempt to lift the burden of skepticism by offering further proofs, he calls instead for forms of *acknowledgment* in relation to the world which respect autonomy without denying connection. (Surrendering to the skeptical burden—that is, refraining from such acknowledgment in the obsessive quest for certainty—forms a major theme in modern tragedy ranging from Shakespeare's *Othello* to Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* [1958, US].) And, like a Zen practitioner scorning any movement toward transcendence (the "odor of abstraction" as D. T. Suzuki put it), Klevan chimes: "To acknowledge and live with skepticism means not craving for

something out of this world to satisfy our sense of the world, our touch with the world; instead, we must seek what is not out of the ordinary." (p. 22) It is this way, according to Cavell, that the experience of cinema, like that of skepticism and melodrama, makes "displacement appear as our natural condition."

Departing from what Adrian Martin (quoted in Klevan) deliciously calls established film scholarship's "gothic orientation" with its "eyeball subjectivity" (where individualized states of heightened feeling like fear or desire reign in genres like film noir, melodrama, and romance), Klevan analyzes four films which thoroughly forgo, in subject matter and technique, the temptation to melodrama. He states, "I take this study to be concerned with illuminating those disclosures [of the everyday] and the manner of their disclosing, discovering in the process the possibilities both for the cinema outside melodrama and for cinema to satisfy our cravings to reconnect with the world." (p. 30) The films selected are: *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Journal d'un curé de campagne*, Robert Bresson, 1950, France), *Loves of a Blonde/A Blonde in Love* (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky*, Milo Forman, 1965, Czechoslovakia), *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, Ozu Yasujiro, 1949, Japan), and *A Tale of Springtime* (*Conte de printemps*, Eric Rohmer, 1989, France).

Before analyzing these films, he looks at a representative moment, aspect, or scene from a half dozen other movies which, however "naturalistic" or "realistic" they might appear, are nonetheless organized around events or crisis. For instance, Klevan reveals Satyajit Ray's *Pathar Panchali* (1955, India) to employ a use of soundtrack that conceives of life as a series of ruptures and crescendos, Bill Douglas's *My Childhood* (1972, GB) to pitch a treatment of poverty that gives undue weight to familiar objects like a cheap teacup, and Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946, Italy) to adopt stylistic contrasts of lighting even as it nixes overt artificial illumination. These examples allow him to define further his sense of the ordinary, selecting films which disclose, to use Heidegger's wonderful phrase, the "worldhood of the world." Rejecting views that romanticize the ordinary, he contends that "we must embark on a quest to find fascination in the parts of the world we share (not parts we create privately), even though it is exactly those shared things that might appear boring because of their obviousness and repetition—indeed, because they occur each and every day." (p. 23) Toward this end, he sees in a kitchen scene in Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D* (1952, Italy) and, better still, in Vermeer's "Woman Pouring Milk" (1658-60) occasions in art where the world is allowed to impart itself through the precise, unemphatic composition of everyday objects, set within everyday situations.

Now on to the main films. Eschewing a theological consideration of *Diary of a Country Priest*, Klevan analyzes the skillful diffusion of its inherently melodramatic story. For him, the film's rendering of the priest's relationship to the diary is emblematic of its understanding of the everyday: "The diary encapsulates the reticent nature of the priest's sensibility; it is not exploited to provide a more florid, vivid or verbose version of events. The diary's utilization is not to enhance the narrative with rhetoric; its prosaic language refuses to enrich the story." (p. 73) For *Loves of a Blonde* he not only explores film's possibilities for expressing the visually unexciting states of

boredom and waiting, but how humdrum characters can be made interesting. And like the unknown women played by Greta Garbo or Bette Davis detailed in Cavell's work, he finds in *Andula*, its heroine, a fellow sister but with debilitating differences: "a character who repeatedly undermines drama because she so effortlessly slides into self-deception while having so little capacity for self-promotion." (p. 126)

In *Late Spring* he finds in its style a significance that accrues obliquely through patterns of domestic routine and character-associated gestures and objects. He also recognizes in it the moving picture's capacity for stillness. Both aspects come together, for example, in the use of static cutaway shots which occur throughout the narrative. Rather than seeing them as sites of transcendence (Paul Schrader), traditional "pillow shots" (Noël Burch), or avant-garde defamiliarizing devices (David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson), Klevan argues for their integration within a fuller consideration of the film's visual field. Finally in *A Tale of Springtime*, he sees in its framework of deceptions a deliberate resistance to criminalizing seduction and intrigue. Featuring a missing necklace that functions as a "MacGuffin" (an object which only serves as the ostensible catalyst for a plot), Klevan contrasts Jeanne and Natasha's friendship with that of Guy and Bruno's in *Strangers on a Train* (Hitchcock, 1951, US). But unlike the sinister lurking beneath the ordinary that characterizes Hitchcock's cinema, here the revelation of truth behind the MacGuffin is that such deceptions are benignly undramatic. (Worth noting is Klevan's insightful contrasts of a seminal feature of each of the main films with that of a Hollywood text, proving that Thomson's thesis is never more accurate than in classical and post-classical US movies. It's wholly clear from these contrasts that

Klevan loves Hollywood's romanticization of the ordinary, but his point is in the disclosure of another aspect of film.) As such, he demonstrates how the film entertains "a conception of important actions or happenings that lie outside of confrontations." (p. 193)

With his synthetic approach to interpretation, what he declares of Ozu's film applies to all four movies in his keenly ambitious and absorbing book debut: "It is a distinction of *Late Spring* that its visual effect and relevance will not be well-explained within critical paradigms concerned with arresting images." (p. 160) Exhibiting in *Disclosure of the Everyday* a study of film experienced once or twice a generation, Klevan, a Lecturer at the University of Kent at Canterbury, strikingly expands Cavell's work while challenging the limitations of much of contemporary film analysis. Perspicacious, aphoristic, and even tangy (never better than in his example of the witty banter between Irene Dunne and Cary Grant forming a "mode of association" in overcoming the threat to marriage at the close of Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* [1937, US]), his writing radiates clarity and a Renoir-like spirit of generosity. Behind his book is the influence of V. F. Perkins, and arguably there has never been a better—or more original—realization of the old master's critical sensibility. His study invites us to examine the possibilities within film even as his book displays wider capacities to write about them.

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